THE **TOP 50 GAMES** OF **2008** REVEALED **PG. 26**

# GAMEINFORMER

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ISSUE 190 FEBRUARY 2009

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**People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games**



## THE WORD OF THE YEAR

**ANDY McNAMARA**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As I look forward to the games of 2009 and backward at the games of 2008, there is one common denominator that I see in all the titles that have an impact on me as a gamer and on the industry as a whole – atmosphere.

The atmosphere of Dead Space is harrowing. From the chilling sound effects to the dark and sinister presentation, the game transports me to another place. Its world gripped me emotionally from the moment I pressed start. The drifting spaceship USG *Ishimura* isn't just a setting; its horrific atmosphere is more important to the game experience than the protagonist Isaac Clarke.

Many in the industry, including myself, tend to attribute this current run of atmospheric games to the mind-blowing BioShock. One could easily argue that while games that stand the test of time have been using atmosphere to draw in players since the days of The Legend of Zelda, but BioShock was the first to do it well in the modern era (obviously benefiting from the bells and whistles of today's technology).

No matter what way you look at it, atmosphere is undeniably a distinguishing characteristic of many of the blockbuster games of 2008. If you look through our list of the Top 50 Games of 2008 (starting on page 26) you can see the trend pop up over and over again. Fallout 3 perfectly conveys a desolate, post-apocalyptic wasteland. The vibrant fairy tale land of Fable II gives the player a feeling of being a meaningful part of another world. Left 4 Dead, Gears of War 2, World of Warcraft – the list goes on and on of games that convincingly transplant the user into another time and space.

This month's cover game, Singularity, is yet another title that builds a fiction, draws players into a world, and gives meaning to their actions. In the best games the modern era has to offer, you aren't just pressing a button. You are affecting a world.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,





**Reiner >>** *reiner@gameinformer.com*

**Handle:** The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Nike's Marty McFly 2015 Shoes (Yep, The Ones From *Back To The Future II*), Watching *X-Files* Start To Finish (I May Need To Be On Suicide Watch), Cyclonus **Dislikes:** Not Being Able To Set The Behavior Of NXE Avatars (I'd Like Them More If They Flipped Me The Bird), John Abraham & Chris Kluwe Not Making The Pro Bowl, Rodimus Prime **Current Favorite Games:** Left 4 Dead, Skate 2, Anything Call Of Duty, Fieldrunners (iPhone), Gears Of War 2, Lost Odyssey (Again)



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**Handle:** The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** Unexpectedly Owning Joe, Nick, And Jeff In Street Fighter With Almost Every Character, My New Super-Flush Toilet, Having Hulu Instead Of Cable, "Good" Marshmallows, *Dexter* Season 3 **Dislikes:** The Term "Voting With Your Pocketbook" (No One Even Uses Those Things Anymore) **Current Favorite Games:** Guitar Hero World Tour, Fight Night Round 4, Bit.Trip Beat, Mirror's Edge



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**Handle:** The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** EA Picking Up Brütal Legend (There Is Justice In The World After All), Being A Scrooge, Video Game Art **Dislikes:** Paladins, Boomers, Tanks, Server Lag, PvP Balance In Lich King **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Left 4 Dead, Gears Of War 2, Advance Wars 2: Day Of Ruin, Fallout 3, Dead Space


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*In memory of Paul Anderson*



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**Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry**



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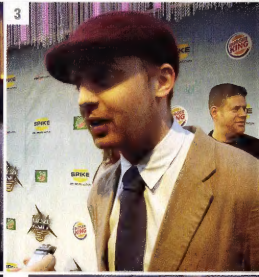
**1** Tim Ng and Frank Filice of Capcom enjoy the ~~butt ass-freezing~~ lovely weather on a visit to Game Informer **2** Will Wright joins the VGA glitterati (please shoot us for using that word) on the way to accept the first-ever "Gamer God" award **3** Media Molecule's Alex Evans shows off some excellent haberdashery at the Spike VGAs **4** Legendary Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima makes an appearance on the red carpet at the VGAs **5** The team behind Bethesda's awesome Fallout 3 celebrate their win for "Best RPG" at the VGAs **6** Suit up! Neil Patrick Harris, a.k.a. America's Greatest Living Actor, lends some star power to the Spike TV Video Game Awards. By the way, if you still call him Doogie, you are lame. He is Barney and he is awesome **7** Meagan hangs with Chad Concelmo of Destructoid **8** Ouch! Kato takes a mean left uppercut from Fight Night producer Brian Hayes



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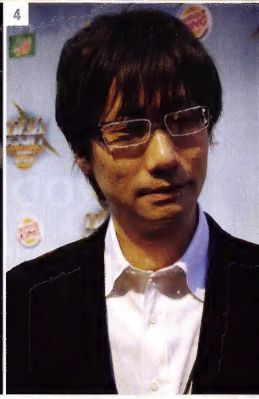
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# RACE PRO

## NOTHING GETS CLOSER

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# DEAR GI

## The Readers Strike Back



### QQ

I know, like me, a lot of your staff is World of Warcraft players and I would like to point out a disgrace Blizzard is allowing to happen. On the Perenolde server, there is an organization known as the Small Guild Alliance (or the SGA), which is a collection of various guilds. Here is my problem: I have made enemies with the person who runs the SGA, and as a result I cannot join any guild "owned" by the SGA. I was denied entrance to my former guild because I have been blacklisted by the SGA. I have screenshots to prove this. I can't go on most instance runs because a lot of SGA members put those groups together and kick me out. According to Blizzard's terms of service, I am entitled to an environment where people can't "harass, threaten, stalk, embarrass or cause distress, unwanted attention or discomfort to any user." It is very clear that this situation is causing great distress and discomfort to me. These people openly change the fairness of the game and create a very negative environment for players who they decide to ostracize for whatever reason.

Matteo Quintana
via email

**There seem to be some notable omissions from your story – specifically the circumstances surrounding the phrases "I have made enemies with the person who runs the SGA" and "players who they decide to ostracize for whatever reason." What did you do, Matteo? A little ninja looting, maybe? Cause multiple wipes? Whatever the case, players don't just randomly blacklist others – you've got to earn it. Furthermore, you can't expect a WoW Game Master to act like a playground monitor, making the other kids play with you whether they want to or not. If things are that bad, you can change your character's name (or even change servers), but it sounds like you are a victim of your own actions rather than the whims of a capricious and shadowy cabal.**

### See Also: Cheating

Have you ever known what it's like to teleport to the very top of the maps of Gears of War only to land on top of a building and stare down at the other players just trying to catch a glimpse of you? Or turn invisible just for the fun of it so no one playing with you can really see you? These are glitches, and they are not intended to be a part of the game, but they are discovered by gamers. We use these special findings not to cheat our way to victory, and not to prove that we are hackers – we are allowing the player to spice up a dull experience. There is more to our bad reputation as cheaters; we are part of an underground community of gamers bringing more light and excitement into the world of gaming.

Brandon
via email

**Look, you can tell yourself whatever you want to in order to sugar-coat multiplayer glitching. But if you believe any of that self-aggrandizing garbage about bringing more excitement to gaming, you are sorely mistaken. By using exploits that break the game's design and give you an unfair advantage, you aren't serving anyone but yourself. It's fine if you want to utilize glitches in single-player mode, since the scope is limited to your own experience. As soon as you use glitches in ways that affect other gamers, you become a low-down, dirty cheater. No one likes playing with cheaters.**

### How Dare They

Can you please chastise Netflix for the way it has been poorly integrated into the world of gamers? Like many, I was excited about the Netflix feature in the New Xbox Experience. I thought I'd be able to watch great movies instantly, and instead I am met with disappointment. Most of the titles listed in the Instant Netflix category are old TV shows, indie movies, and the occasional good movie. Netflix advertised that thousands of movies were ready to stream over Xbox Live in HD, and instead, they neglected to mention that the thousands of movies would be mostly members of the B team. Please call out Netflix for pulling the bait and switch on us gamers.

Dan Fischer
via email

**Well, it's kind of hard to "call out" a company that gives its Xbox 360-owning members instant access to a bunch of movies at no extra charge. From the announcement of the partnership, it was clear that the entire Netflix library wouldn't be accessible. While all of the titles available to watch instantly may not be winners, there are still some great choices, and it's nice to have something to watch as you wait for your next disc to arrive in the mail. We'd like to see improvements to the video quality and fixes for occasional random stops, but it's a pretty sweet deal overall.**

### The Curse Of Youth

When I was looking through the Reader Top Five in Issue 187, I noticed something didn't quite make sense. Lynne Philips, who appears to be at least 60 years old, has astoundingly complex RPGs on her list! I don't see how a senior citizen could understand the complicated leveling systems of Oblivion, Mass Effect, and Final Fantasy when my mom can't even grasp Mario.

Colin James
via email

**Ah, hubris. Did it occur to you that people don't get stupider as they age? To anyone with some gaming experience, those titles are completely accessible. Nothing apart from acquiring that experience – which can be done by gamers of any age – would be a barrier to enjoying what an RPG has to offer. Time to wise up: Just because your mom isn't a gamer doesn't mean that an entire pastime is beyond the comprehension of anyone past their 'tweens.**

### Do or Don't?

After reading your "Achievement Dos and Don'ts" article, I started wondering about

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

## GI COMMUNITY

**Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today**

**THE QUESTION:**
***What is your 2008 game of the year??***



*Easily Left 4 Dead. It's about time someone released a first person shooter that didn't require complex stories and pointless side missions. I want a game that says "Here's a gun, and here are loads of zombies. Have fun, dummy," and Valve delivers.*

**Joe 43302**

*The best game I played this year was, surprisingly, Boom Blox. Finally, something that makes the Wii fun for both hardcore and casual gamers, and an insanely addicting game that anyone can pick up and play. Steven Spielberg is a genius at both movies and gaming!*

**aubradley84**

*Dead Space. Not only is this one of the scariest games I've ever played, but the amazing visuals, creative weapons, and strategic dismemberment set this game way above anything else this year. Did I mention this game is very terrifying?*

**Wii_Master**

*Civilization Revolution. Firaxis took their great franchise (that was PC exclusive) and threw it on the major consoles. Its first time on consoles and it had perfect controls, charming graphics, and endless replay that just never gets old.*

**bpfx2116**

*BioShock was absolutely phenomenal. Hey, I'm a PS3 owner, so it counts!*

**Testament_ggx2**

*Metal Gear Solid 4. In addition to the amazing graphics and tight gameplay, MGS 4 brought together so many emotional connections that had been forged throughout the MGS series. MGS 4 was an experience unlike any other game.*

**Mskrchl**



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the achievement points that I have unlocked playing 360 games. I have to admit some of these so-called milestones are bogus. Why exactly did I receive 5 points for dressing like a goth in Fable II, pressing start for the first time in Soulcalibur, or 10 points for submitting a photo in Gears of War 2? This is nothing to brag about. Why not give me 300 points for doing the seemingly impossible like kill a difficult boss with only three bullets?

Noah T. Smith
via email

**One of the main draws of achievements is the steady flow of recognition for your accomplishments. It may not be hard to create a character or submit a photo, but it's still gratifying to see that little notification pop up when you do. Plus, the series of incremental rewards encourage players to check out game modes they might have overlooked otherwise. If a game's achievement list is full of impossible feats and endurance challenges, it can be more daunting and discouraging than anything else.**

### None Your Base

Exactly how many letters did you get regarding the fact that "All your base are belong to us" was not listed among the Top 10 Lines in Gaming? Did you seriously somehow manage to leave out the only line that appears on T-shirts, has its own techno dance track, and Wikipedia entry? Seriously, for great justice, you need to fix this.

Adam Wechsler
via email

**Don't get your Zigs in a bundle; becoming an Internet meme doesn't automatically secure a phrase its place among the best lines in gaming. Most gamers never even played Zero Wing (the game the line is taken from), since it was never released in North America. The only reason the phrase caught on is because some poor translator didn't have time to do things properly, and then someone on the Internet made a video. There are lots of funny mistranslations out there in the world of gaming, but they just don't stack up to great lines that actually have context like "Nuclear launch detected" and "Would you kindly."**





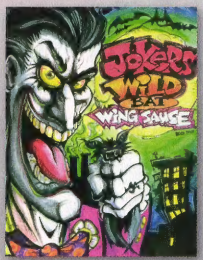

**ALLISON RADPOUR**
According to Baby Mario's Law, little kid versions of adult characters are usually terrible and annoying. This art is an exception to the rule

**Send to:**
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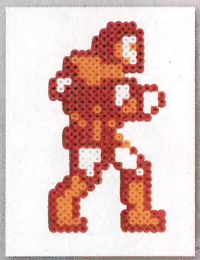
## reader art

Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.

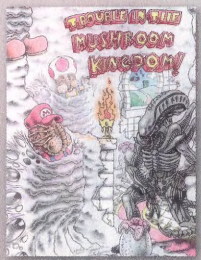
**ERIC OLIVER**
Shopping Tip: We do not recommend buying wing sauce from people who laugh hysterically before, during, and after your purchase




**AMANDA ZAMORANO**
The only good Belmont is a 2D Belmont



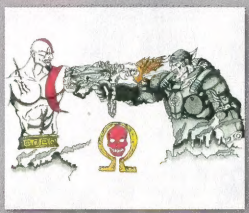
**TAISEN KATAKURA**
If you want a mouthful of facehugger, just tell an alien that its princess is another castle




**RICHARD RAMIREZ**
"I knew I shouldn't have worn my spearmint-flavored outfit today!"



**BRYAN MENDOZA**
Those "whose goatee is stupidest" arguments can really escalate quickly



**CORRECTIONS:**
In the "Meet the DSi" feature in issue 188, we incorrectly stated that the outside camera of the DSi is 3 megapixels. It is actually .3 megapixels. Also, Killzone 2 is still a PlayStation 3 exclusive, contrary to our listing it as a multiplatform title in issue 189.


ONE SAMURAI ROAMS THE LAND WITH A MISSION OF REVENGE
HE WILL NEVER REST UNTIL HIS FATHER'S BLOOD IS VINDICATED
SAMUEL L. JACKSON IS
AFRO SAMURAI
KELLY HU
RON PERLMAN
MUSIC BY THE RZA
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SURGE

news

# THE EARLY RETURNS ARE IN

## HOLIDAY CHEER NOT SPREAD TO ALL

**The holidays are usually a time for high celebration in the video game industry, but in these tough economic times the news so far is a mix of good and bad – depending, of course, on who you are.**

### NPD's November Tabulations

The November numbers from industry sales charters NPD show a strong showing for video games when compared to last year. The sole surprise in console sales is the PlayStation 3. Sony's console received almost no holiday bump in November. Compare this with over 2 million in sales clocked by the still-strong Wii – including 800,000 over Thanksgiving weekend alone – and the almost million Xbox 360 units shifted by Microsoft, and Sony is clearly the loser.

| NPD November Console Sales | |
|---|---|
| Nintendo Wii | 2.04 million |
| Nintendo DS | 1.57 million |
| Xbox 360 | 836,000 |
| PSP | 421,000 |
| PlayStation 3 | 378,000 |
| PlayStation 2 | 206,000 |

| NPD's Industry Sales for November | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Nov 07 | Nov 08 | % Change | Year to Date Nov 07 | Year to Date Nov 08 | % Change |
| Hardware | $1.1 Billion | $1.21 Billion | +10% | $5.22 Billion | $5.93 Billion | +14% |
| Software | $1.31 Billion | $1.45 Billion | +11% | $6.28 Billion | $8.21 Billion | +31% |



### SONY'S TROUBLES

PlayStation 3's domestic sales numbers for November pale in comparison to its competitors, and even its numbers from last year. While the PS3 moved 466,000 consoles in November 2007, this year's total fell to 378,000. The flailing console's numbers in the rest of the world aren't much better, either. According to Microsoft, the Xbox 360 received a 124-percent increase in European sales for the month over last year as compared to 3 percent for the PS3 and 43 percent for the Wii. Microsoft says that it also enjoyed its best week of sales ever in Europe during this period.

Sony as a whole just isn't having a good month. The company's Tokyo headquarters announced the planned elimination of 8,000 jobs and just as many part-time positions by 2010. The company is also closing manufacturing facilities in an attempt to save $1.1 billion by the end of the next fiscal year. Sony is not delineating how this will affect the PlayStation brand, but with the PlayStation 3 performing this poorly, it can't be immune.



### MIDWAY IN FREEFALL

Midway's descent continues, as the company announced plans to lay off a quarter of its global staff – about 180 full-time employees – as well as shut down its Austin, Texas studio. Midway says it's suspending development on some unannounced games that were previously scheduled to release in 2010 and 2011.

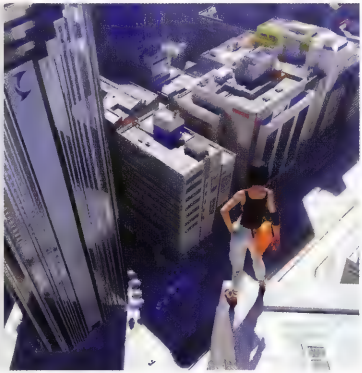
Media mogul Sumner Redstone also sold his controlling interest in the company, which triggered a provision that allows creditors to demand repayment of Midway's $150 million in debt within 30 days. Whether they will do this and gut the company remains to be seen.

### MIRROR'S EDGE, NEED FOR SPEED DISAPPOINT

Critics have applauded EA's move into new IP with Dead Space, Boom Blox, Spore, and Mirror's Edge, but financially the results are decidedly mixed. Dead Space has sold well, but not so for Mirror's Edge. Electronic Arts is citing poor sales of the DICE-developed title, as well as that of Need for Speed Undercover, as reasons for lowering the company's fiscal outlook through March 31. Financial analysts also point to the worse-than-expected sales of Rock Band 2 for the drop.

Need for Speed Undercover underperformed to the point that EA has folded developer Black Box into its EA Canada studio in Vancouver.

The financial fallout includes EA cutting 10 percent of its global work force, closing nine office locations, and dropping several unannounced projects. EA CEO John Riccitiello says that core and casual games will feel the pinch, but sports would be spared. Speaking to Mirror's Edge in particular, Riccitiello says that the franchise as a whole will be evaluated for the future.



games

# BRÜTAL LEGEND IS BACK IN BLACK

## EA PICKS UP DOUBLE FINE GAME

Tim Schafer's action game/roadie-rock opus Brütal Legend hasn't been in developmental hell quite as long as *Chinese Democracy* was, but at least the game's release is in sight. Electronic Arts stepped up and agreed to publish the game, which is expected to release this fall for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

The game was originally going to be published by Vivendi, but when it merged with Activision last year, Brütal Legend was let go in the ensuing turnaround. Game Informer heard rumors that Schafer and his studio Double Fine were at odds with Activision anyway, so perhaps the game was going to change hands regardless.

Brütal Legend puts you in the leather jacket and long hair of metal roadie Eddie Riggs (voiced by Jack Black). Eddie is thrown back in time to a mythical world that looks like a heavy metal album cover come to life. Eddie must build an army of rock and roll minions and melt faces with his guitar solos.



# Hardcore Gamer's Guide to the Wii



Since the last E3, the hardcore gamers who make up Nintendo's loyal fan base have been feeling left out of the party. Awash in new customers won through ingenious marketing campaigns, Nintendo's focus has been firmly on the new, more casual audience flocking to Wii in droves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, gamers who don't dream of calling their girlfriends to go shopping in Animal Crossing or playing Nintendogs on Carrie Underwood's tour bus are beginning to feel like their money might have been better spent elsewhere.

However, as is usually the case, perception differs from reality. While there's no doubt the Wii is drowning in a deluge of terrible party games, there is still a good number of honest-to-goodness, well-made games available for the system. If you're a Wii gamer looking for something a little meatier than Wii Sports, here is our Hardcore Gamer's Guide to the Wii. Study up, and then get ready to steal the Wii remote back from your little sister.



Mario Kart Wii

## The Heavy Hitters

While this might sound like stating the obvious, we're still surprised by how many Wii owners we've talked to still haven't played some of the biggest and best games available on the system. These aren't cult hits, either – we're talking Super Mario Galaxy, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Mario Kart Wii, The Legend of Zelda: The Twilight Princess, and Metroid Prime 3: Corruption. These franchises made Nintendo a legendary company, and the most recent editions are just as fantastic as you'd expect. Quite simply, they are some of the best gaming has to offer on any system. Don't forget Super Paper Mario, an amazing action/RPG that will bring back fond memories to anyone reared in the 8- or 16-bit eras. It's a funny and phenomenal Nintendo first-party title that's often overlooked.



Super Smash Bros. Brawl

The Legend of Zelda: The Twilight Princess



Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

## Diversely Hardcore

Better software support gives the Wii a fairly diverse lineup, and hardcore gamers know variety is the spice of any gaming life. Start off your Wii collection with a couple of casual games that stand up to scrutiny, yet appeal to casual gamers. The best of these is EA and Stephen Spielberg's Boom Blox, a fantastic amalgam of Jenga and Tetris that made it one of 2008's most entertaining titles. The Rayman Raving Rabbids series also distinguishes itself from the deluge of bad casual titles by providing fun and genuinely funny fast-action minigames. Oh, and you might want to check out a couple of under-the-radar cult hits in the music genre, Rock Band 2 and Guitar Hero World Tour. Ever heard of them?

If RPGs are your bag, your options are fairly limited. Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of a New World is the only traditional RPG available for the system. However, EA's My Sims can be a great outlet for your desire to guide the life of a virtual avatar, and Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure emulates the graphical style and environmental puzzle solving of the genre.

For more esoteric fare, we recommend the sleeper hit Kororinpa Marble Mania, an odd update of the classic arcade game Marble Madness. If you're feeling particularly adventurous, you might even want to brave the strange and ultraviolent No More Heroes. The GI review crew was not fond of it, but its anime-style craziness has won a very rabid cult following. Finally, Geometry Wars: Galaxies nicely updates classic arcade space shooting for a new generation of gamers.


Rock Band 2


Boom Blox

## A Treasure Trove of Classics

While we're glad you have more than enough good games to keep you playing your Wii for months, Nintendo's Virtual Console is an embarrassment of riches for any gamer who loves the classics. With over 270 games from a host of old-school systems, there's literally something for everyone. Here are some of the highlights for each system:

**NES**
- Donkey Kong
- The Legend of Zelda
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]

**SNES**
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]

**N64**
- [illegible]
- Paper Mario
- Star Fox 64
- Super Mario 64
- [illegible]
- Ocarina of Time

**Sega Master System**
- Alex Kidd in Miracle World
- Space Harrier
- [illegible]

**Sega Genesis**
- Altered Beast
- Golden Axe
- Gunstar Heroes
- [illegible]
- Toejam & Earl
- Shinobi III: Return of the Ninja Master

**TurboGrafx-16/ TurboGrafx-CD**
- Alien Crush
- Bonk's Adventure
- [illegible]

**Neo Geo**
- The King of Fighters '94
- Metal Slug
- Samurai Shodown


Lost Winds

## WiiWare

While critics here lamented Nintendo for failing to provide a robust online service like Xbox Live, the company's WiiWare retail channel is a growing outlet for both classic and new downloadable titles. A lot of these have come from the new generation of start-up developers creating innovative and ingenious games that differ from the usual fare provided by mainstream publishers. Foremost among these is the physics-based puzzle game World of Goo, which won awards as a prototype at the Independent Games Festival. Another standout is the bucolic platformer Lost Winds, which melds a traditional 2D platforming design with unique motion-control wind mechanics and a gorgeous art style. For those looking for more well-known fare, check out the excellent Tetris Party or Final Fantasy: My Life as a King, which refocuses the RPG universe as a city building strategy game. On the lighter side, nerds the world over will revel in the funny (although sometimes less than polished) downloadable episodes of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People.

## Third-Party Heroes

The success of the Wii translates into the best third-party support that Nintendo has seen on any system since the days of the SNES. Unfortunately, much of that has been in the form of quickly made casual games. Still, there are a number of third-party ports and original titles you may have missed. The first place to start is with three ports of some classic PS2-era titles: Capcom's Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition and Okami, and Rockstar's great Bully: Scholarship Edition. Whether it's Okami's graceful visuals, RE 4's white-knuckle terror, or Bully's sassy sandbox gameplay, you can really sink your teeth into these games, providing hours of fun for your gaming dollar.

While the sports genre – a staple on most consoles – has disappointed on the Wii (see EA's dumbed down "All Play" versions of its games), there are a couple of highlights for the hardcore – Konami's Pro Evo Soccer series and Skate It!, both of which feature complex and challenging gameplay that uses the Wii remote in interesting ways.

Finally, a couple of adapted versions of two recent high-profile releases, Tomb Raider Underworld (although watch for a bug in the Thailand level that Eidos has apologized for) and Call of Duty: World at War, prove that developers are getting better at adapting current-generation blockbusters to the less graphically intensive confines of the Wii.


Bully: Scholarship Edition


Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition

# afterwords

FEATURE PUB DEVELOPERS IN THE HOTSEAT



**CLINT HOCKING**
Creative Director, Ubisoft Montreal

UNLIMITED ENABLED

## Far Cry 2



**Ubisoft's bold follow-up to its surprise 2004 hit was nothing if not controversial. Taking the reins from Crytek, new developer Ubisoft Montreal chose to abandon the story and tropic setting of the original in favor of a more ominous locale – a fictional African nation teetering on the brink of anarchy. The bold new direction earned both critical praise and detractors. Some critics loved the open world action and politically charged story, while others felt major design gaffes kept the game from realizing its potential. Ubisoft Montreal's Clint Hocking took time out of his schedule to address these reader-generated questions.**

**DontTr3aD: I loved the Jackal. Was he based on any particular literary characters or historical persons?**
**CLINT HOCKING:** He's based loosely on Kurtz – the madman from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – but he also has a little bit of Far Cry's Jack Carver thrown in (note the tacky red shirt). He is a cocky, Han Solo-type of roguish arms dealer who has come to see (and embrace to some extent) the madness of the situation around him. He is also attempting – perhaps unconsciously – to redeem himself for a life that contributed so greatly to the kinds of troubling things he is seeing. This "end justifies the means" philosophy is also the philosophy the game design's systems impose to a certain extent on the player.

**RaceR: Did you want to include more NPC characters in the cities like Assassin's Creed had?**
**CH:** Yeah – we originally planned to have much more civilian interaction. We never wanted crowds of civilians going about their business – there is anarchy going on – but we did want meetings with the underground to include many more civilians. We wanted to have refugee camps and places where the player could experience firsthand the plight of the civilians displaced by this conflict. This would have given the player a much stronger motivation and would have made the Jackal's motivation (as it is revealed late in the game) much clearer and easier to follow. Unfortunately, numerous technical and production challenges whittled away at the civilian population until we were effectively left with "three guys in a room."



**MasterPBoy: Why were there no dangerous animals? For some reason I thought the plains of Africa might be a tad dangerous to go strolling around in at night.**
**CH:** We decided fairly early on that, while leopards, lions, and crocodiles would have been awesome, having animals preying on other animals, having multiple animation skeletons and having all the AI, art, sound and other features to support this other class of animals (beyond grazing herbivores) would have added a lot of work that would have ultimately detracted from stuff that was, frankly, more important – AI combat behavior and animation, for example. That said, I clung fairly hard to a stripped down crocodile design that might have allowed them to be in the game in a limited way…but this too was cut in production.

**Ninjadamus: Why did you decide on such a wonky mission structure? I have to save multiple times on the way to a mission because everyone on the road wants to kill me and it takes forever.**
**CH:** To me – conceptually at least – I see no difference between the mission structure we use and the one used in a linear game with a checkpoint-driven save game system, except that our game is of course not linear at all. In Call of Duty 4 (which is an awesome game), there are checkpoints every 8-15 minutes, and in our game, you can easily reach a safe house every 8-15 minutes, stopping as you pass each guard post or minor encounter along the way. The difference is that in CoD 4, you can't miss the checkpoints because the game is linear, and in our game, the openness forces us to make you intentionally save the game. This necessity to stop and save is the pacing of the game. Admittedly, it is a very different pacing than in most shooters, but we felt it added tension to each leg of the journey and made player decisions about which path to take to each of the main locations to be meaningful and interesting.

**DoktorGenius: Why weren't the sniper rifles in the same class as the rocket and grenade launchers instead of the assault rifle class? I should be able to carry an AK-47 and a SVD if I can carry an AK-47 and a bazooka.**
**CH:** Originally sniper rifles were in the "special" class, and it led to a situation where almost no one ever carried a special weapon except for a sniper rifle – the system degenerated to a few load-out configurations that were not very interesting and caused most players to play the same way every time. We wanted the choice of which three weapons to carry to be as hard as possible – and putting the assaults and the snipers opposite each other guaranteed that.

**MasterPBoy: Why did neither faction care that I was helping the other?**
**CH:** Well, they do care, actually. Some of the dialogue in each mission briefing is different based on your prior relationship with the faction, and whether you have worked for them or the enemy in the past. Admittedly, this is pretty weakly implemented (to the point of being virtually unnoticeable). There was also some on-paper design that would have had one of the faction lieutenants actively trying to bribe you to switch sides between missions if you were working for the other side and would have dynamically adjusted the amount you got paid for a mission based on your relationship with the factions, but we never had time to implement it.

**V3rTaBreaker: Why are all the stealth weapons/stealth upgrades so expensive?**
**CH:** Our stealth and AI detection system is not as polished as we would have liked. Sneaking can be quite difficult and recovering from being detected is even more so – that's just a side effect of having run out of polish time. Compounding this problem is that last-minute balancing of the economy which forced us to "dump" some diamonds onto single items – meaning as we made adjustments to the stuff you could buy, we ended up with surplus diamonds – we could not risk removing diamonds from the world as this would be too hard to test – we had to keep the totals the same, and that meant pushing the excess diamonds onto a few objects that were alone in their class. Consequently, the already expensive stealth suit was collapsed from three different biome-specific suits into one very expensive one, and other diamonds were also piled on top of the stealth suit, the health kit upgrades, and the vehicle repair manuals. I agree that the end result is that the stealth suit is noticeably too expensive for what it gives.

**SirSlaysALot: Why did you decide to include respawning enemies at all the guard posts?**
**CH:** This issue was raised by one of the programming leads late in the development cycle, but my feeling at the time was that it was not an issue. I knew it was happening, but the number of places in which it was noticeable was small. In fact, the number of places where you notice it is small – it is just that they almost all happen to be very close to safe houses that are frequently visited en route to and from major objectives, meaning that almost every player encounters these few places in almost every mission. We didn't do anything intentionally to make it that way, but we also didn't do anything to fix it, and that is my fault because I misestimated the severity of the issue. In hindsight, having read numerous reviews of the game, this issue seems to be the single largest problem with the game, and it is frustrating for a lot of players. It makes me a bit sad to think that this one slightly mishandled, moderately scoped technical design issue seems to have such a powerful influence on the overall perception of the game when I feel we did so many things well. I guess that's the challenge of making hugely ambitious games – you're juggling a lot of plates and it's very hard to pull off a perfect finish.

WAR MAKES GIANTS OF MEN
AND EMPIRES OF NATIONS

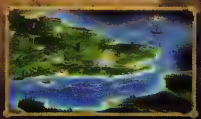
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Games for Windows

# the top 10 video game romances

*It's the time of the year when love is in the air, and therefore the perfect time to recognize the sweethearts of the video game universe. These characters' romantic relationships have captivated us through the good times and the bad, adding emotion and depth to our gaming experience. The couples (and one love triangle) on this list illustrate what happens when Cupid scores a headshot.*

## 1 Tidus and Yuna (Final Fantasy X)



**With all of the fighting and world-saving that needs to be done, it's rare for a game to devote the time to develop a relationship as believable and fascinating as Tidus and Yuna. Gamers witness the entire scope of their romance, from their first meeting to their tearful farewell, and the time in between gradually establishes their growing affection through natural conversations (yeah, except the laughing part). While this may bring the Cloud/Aeris and Squall/Rinoa defenders out of the woodwork, Tidus and Yuna take the top spot when it comes to making the gamer care about the fate of a courtship.**

## 2 Link and Zelda (The Legend of Zelda series)



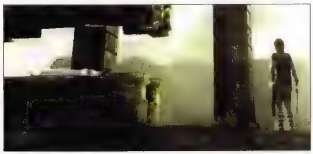
No matter how many times the continuity of this series is reset, Link and Zelda always manage to find each other. The nature of their relationship changes from game to game, but there is always a sense of destiny surrounding these two defenders of Hyrule…unless you're watching the old *Legend of Zelda* TV show, in which case you should replace "destiny" with "awfulness."

## 3 You and The Companion Cube (Portal)



No, this isn't about Portal's protagonist, Chell. It's about you, the player, and the Aperture Science Weighted Companion Cube. Your time together was short, but with the aid of some drawings on the wall (and some prompting from GLaDOS), you knew that you and the Companion Cube were meant to be together for all time – or at least until you found the incinerator.

## 4 Wanderer and Mono (Shadow of the Colossus)



Hardly a word is spoken pertaining to the Wanderer's relationship with his fallen love, but the sacrifices he makes on her behalf show his devotion. Not every guy would fight over a dozen giant stone golems and gradually absorb the essence of an evil deity in the name of love. Hey, we made it through this entry without making an inappropriate crack about the Wanderer and his horse. Good for us!

## 5 Mario and Peach (Super Mario series)



Mario and Peach may always be smiling, but tension must be building beneath the surface. They've had to work through Mario's history with Pauline and Daisy, not to mention Peach's issues with settling down. Then there's the whole Toad thing. Maybe the most visible couples aren't always the healthiest, but Mario and Peach have stuck together through the tough times.

## 6 Jackie and Jenny (The Darkness)



A simple and honest scene can convey more than a hundred lines of dialogue, especially when done as well as in The Darkness. Jackie and Jenny (and the player) just sit on couch and watch TV together, but it is one of the most genuine moments in gaming romance. However, this innocuous scene becomes truly heart wrenching when their relationship takes a tragic turn later in the game.

## 7 Snake and Eva (Metal Gear Solid 3)



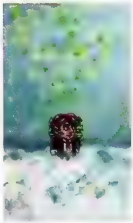
At first, Snake and Eva's interactions fit a familiar secret agent/femme fatale dynamic, simultaneously working together and against each other. However, the plot deepens and a more intimate connection forms as they protect each other and share a secret the rest of the world can never know. Yes, Otacon, love can bloom on the battlefield…just not for you.

## 8 Lenneth and Lucien (Valkyrie Profile)



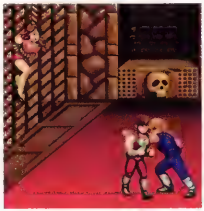
Though Lenneth has been elevated to godhood, she still retains feelings from her human childhood – feelings that resurface when she is forced to claim the soul of her old sweetheart, Lucien. Whether she pursues or suppresses these emotions is up to the player, but the conflict between her duty and her desire gives Lenneth some compelling depth as a character.

## 9 Tim and the Princess (Braid)



The idealistic vision of romance is two starry-eyed individuals smitten with each other…but it isn't always reciprocal. Tim's single-minded pursuit of the Princess is an obsession, causing him to surrender his own happiness and ambition in hopes of finding her. When he finally does, the player realizes that the infatuation was one-sided all along, and that Tim isn't quite the hero he seemed to be.

## 10 Billy and Jimmy and Marian (Double Dragon)



After Billy and Jimmy fight through legions of thugs, including mutated giants and one dude with a machine gun, they are faced with one final challenge: beat the crap out of each other to win the favor of Marian. She may not be the most loyal girlfriend ever, but you can't blame Marian for choosing the toughest Lee brother. She did get sucker-punched by goons in broad daylight, after all.




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More News You Can Use

### XBOX 360 ARCADE UPGRADE

Microsoft has upgraded the Xbox 360 Arcade units by imbuing them with 256MB of internal storage, matching the size of the external memory units.



### NCSOFT LEAVES ESA

MMO developer/publisher NCsoft has pulled out of the Entertainment Software Association, the industry lobby group that organizes E3, among other things. Other publishers such as Activision and LucasArts had left the organization previously.



### EA TO EXPLORE NINE CIRCLES OF HELL

EA is descending into hell in its video game exploration of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* poem, Dante's Inferno. EA Redwood Shores, the studio that created Dead Space, is making the game. No release date or timeframe has been announced for Dante's Inferno, which looks to be taking more than a few cues from God of War.

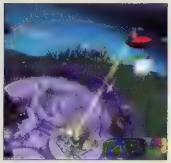



### SCI CONTINUES TO ATTRACT

Eidos parent company SCi has attracted suitors off and on for the past number of years, and the latest news is that both Ubisoft and Electronic Arts are looking into buying the company that owns the Tomb Raider and Hitman franchises.

### EA LETS OFF SOME STEAM

Valve's Steam game download service got a boost with the news that EA was finally putting its two cents in. Spore (shown), Mass Effect, and more are already available, and Mirror's Edge and Dead Space are on the way.



game

# WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

## UPDATED RELEASES

**Every once and a while we like to check in on games that we haven't heard about in a while. Here's an update on a few anticipated titles that have received new release dates since we last saw them.**

**Heavy Rain** Sony – PS3

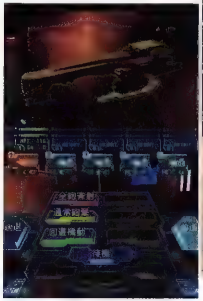
Since opening eyes at E3 2006, this game's release date has never been nailed down. Sony has tabbed the game to come out this year, although we wouldn't be surprised if it slid into 2010.



**Dissidia: Final Fantasy**

Square Enix – PSP

This is one of the few upcoming Final Fantasy games with an actual release window. Square tells us to expect the title in the summer.



**Infinite Space** Sega – DS

We're excited by this RPG, which lets you customize your own spaceship. The game was originally scheduled to come out in the first quarter of this year, but Sega tells us that it's now slated for the more nebulous "sometime in 2009." Let's hope it's sooner rather than later.



**Borderlands** 2K Games – PS3, 360, PC

2K Games originally said the game would come out sometime this year, and the release date has solidified into fall 2009.

**Mafia II**

2K Games – PS3, 360, PC

This sequel to Illusion Softwork's sandbox crime hit is cemented to appear in the fall.



**This is Vegas**

Midway – PS3, 360, PC

As of now, this game is still coming out despite all the turmoil over at Midway. Expect it in the second half of this year.





## NINTENDO'S SCHEDULE

Here's an overview of some of the titles that will be hitting the Wii and DS. Although it's not complete, it's unfortunate that we don't see Punch Out listed for the Wii, the next Professor Layton for the DS (which is out in Japan already!), or more triple-A titles from Nintendo for either system.

### Wii

**Nintendo**
- New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis (March)
- New Play Control! Pikmin (March)

**Ubisoft**
- Tenchu: Shadow Assassins (February)
- Broken Sword: Shadows of the Templars: Director's Cut (March)

**Sega**
- The House of The Dead: Overkill (February)
- Sonic and the Black Knight (March)
- MadWorld (March)

**Electronic Arts**
- SimAnimals (Jan. 27)
- NASCAR Kart Racing (Feb. 10)

**Hudson**
- Fishing Master World Tour (Jan. 6)
- Marble Saga Kororinpa (spring)

**Destineer**
- WordJong Party (January)
- Cradle of Rome (February)

**Crave Entertainment**
- Monster Pals (March)
- Puzzle Challenges and More! (February)

### DS

**Nintendo**
- Personal Trainer: Math (Jan. 12)
- Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon (Feb. 16)
- Pokémon Platinum (March 22)

**Square Enix**
- Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time (spring)

**RockStar**
- Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars (March 17)

**Atlus**
- Legacy of Ys: Books I & II (Feb. 10)

**Electronic Arts**
- Zubo (March)
- Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure (Q1)
- SimAnimals (Jan. 27)

**Konami**
- Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero (Q1)
- Suikoden Tierkreis (Q1)
- Little Magician's Magic Adventure (Q1)

## LOST IN THE WILDERNESS

It's not unusual for projects to be announced without mentioning a release date, and here are a handful of games on the radar that are still in limbo.

### Indiana Jones

We featured this game and its proprietary rag doll physics a while back, but it failed to come out with the movie last summer. A LucasArts spokesman said the project is still in development, and that its release date has yet to be determined.



### Sadness

This striking Wii game being developed by Polish studio Nibris features stylish black-and-white graphics.

### Human Head/Mark Ecko Project

The Prey developer signed up with the urban culture vulture last year, but there hasn't been any new news since.

### Warren Spector/Disney Project

We expect to hear soon about the collaboration between this unlikely pair.

### Red Dead Revolver

Now that Rockstar has finished Grand Theft Auto IV, we hope to see the wheels turn on this game. There are rumors that this is Rockstar's PS3-exclusive project, but no one knows for sure.

### Crackdown 2

Crackdown 2 is without a publisher, and new rumors have surfaced tying it to new studio Ruffian Games.

### APB

Original Crackdown developer Real Time Worlds is still working on this open world title, but a release date or timeframe remains elusive.

### NCsoft's Exclusive PS3 Project

There hasn't been a peep since this game was announced at E3 2007.

### Deus Ex 3

Eidos' new Montreal studio is resurrecting this franchise, but no release date is in sight.

## LOOSE TALK

**Hot Gaming Gossip**



### GRAN TURISMO 5 ON THE WAY?

Spanish financial newspaper *El Financiero* says that James Armstrong, Sony Computer Entertainment's executive for southern Europe, revealed that a new version of Gran Turismo will hit the continent next Christmas. Is this finally Gran Turismo 5, or is it another prequel to the game like 2008's Gran Turismo 5 Prologue (shown)?



Will the next GTA return to Liberty City or head to another city?

### A NEW GRAND THEFT AUTO

Could we be this lucky? Loose Talk has heard that Rockstar North is already working on the next Grand Theft Auto title, and that this game is scheduled to come out holiday 2009. We're not talking about new DLC or a collection of previously available DLC, we're talking about a full retail game. We expect this title to follow the suit of previous GTAs and use a subtitle such as GTA: San Andreas, etc. Tokyo might be a possible setting for the game, but details are non-existent at this time.



### TONY HAWK SIGHTING

Gamers were slightly relieved when Activision announced that it was not releasing its customary Tony Hawk game last year, given how stale the series had gotten. Now that the franchise has been given to a new developer, details are starting to come out about the new title, dubbed Tony Hawk's Adrenaline. The title will feature a board peripheral that you will stand on WiiFit-style to perform tricks. Could this be the re-launch the franchise needs?

*Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.*

## NAME THAT GAME

**Test Your Sight**

This game was so bad that about the only thing going for it was that it contained an early demo for Tekken 5. A Tekken adventure based on assassin Nina Williams, this PS2 side-story was worse than watching an episode of *Three's Company* offshoot *The Ropers*. This month's title wasn't even a fighting game in the Tekken mold, but was an undead an action/adventure title – and a failed one at that.

(Answer on page 23)



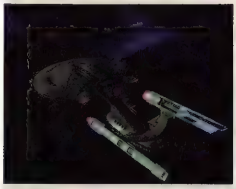
# THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

**When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin**



## BAD

Stargate Worlds developer Cheyenne Mountains is having trouble meeting its payroll, but says it is continuing work on the MMO project. The company still plans to start the second phase of the game's beta program early this year.



## GOOD

Atari is trying to change its fortunes by injecting some new blood. The company is hooking up with puzzle master Tetsuya Mizuguchi for a new project. Atari has also acquired Champions Online/Star Trek Online developer Cryptic Studios.



## BAD

New York governor David Paterson says he's considering a tax on downloadable content as part of a larger initiative to cover the state's $15.4 billion budget deficit. Paterson believes the potential tax would equalize downloads with the taxes charged by brick and mortar stores.



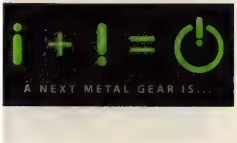
## BAD

TimeSplitters and Haze developer Free Radical Design has closed its doors in the UK. According to website GameIndustry.biz, the company was in the process of developing Star Wars: Battlefront III. The game will now go to Rebellion, the developer behind PSP title Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron.



## GOOD

Sam and Dan Houser both re-signed contracts with Take-Two Interactive to remain the creative force behind Rockstar Games until January 31, 2012. The pair's contracts were up this February, and Game Informer had heard rumors that Ubisoft and Capcom were trying to woo the brothers away from Rockstar.




## BAD

Konami got everyone and their mother's blog thinking that it was releasing a Metal Gear title for Xbox 360 with a teaser campaign. Unfortunately, it turns out to just be a Solid Snake game for the iPhone and iPod Touch. It's a stealth franchise, but not being on the 360 these days makes it almost invisible.




**In the world of video game music, Nobuo Uematsu needs no introduction. He first gained recognition as the composer of the Final Fantasy series' most memorable melodies, but Uematsu has branched out with other projects like his band (the Black Mages), his record label (Dog Ear Records), and the Press Start series of concerts. In this installment of Sound Check, we get the legendary composer's opinion on the current state of music in the video game industry.**



**How did you get your start in music? Did you aspire to create music for games?**
Music is something I picked up on my own. I just messed around with the piano and guitar lying around the house and figured out how to make songs. I didn't set out to become a composer for video games. It just happened that about 25 years ago, composing game music was the only work out there for some no-name guy with no connections.

**How is doing a game soundtrack today different from 15 years ago? Do you ever wish you could go back to composing for 8-bit games?**
I actually don't think it's changed all that much. The only thing that's really changed is what kind of music you're aiming for: the rich and glorious sound of the orchestra, or just some good old fun electronic music on the 8-bit. Right now I don't have any real intention of going back to compose music for 8-bit games, but if something interesting came along, I'd love to give it a shot.

**How closely do you follow the musical scores of other video games?**
Basically, I've never gone out of my way to listen to music from other games. Perhaps it's because I'm scared I'd find out how bad I really am and start copying what others do…there's just that many incredible composers in the industry making music for games. I could name a number of soundtracks that I like, and by holding the Press Start concert each year, I have a chance to share those favorites with audiences across the world.

**Video games are becoming a more global business. What do you perceive as the major differences between musical tastes of regions like Japan, Europe, and the U.S. when it comes to games?**
No matter where you go, the culture and circumstances surrounding people are different in every country and region, and it's only natural for composers to express those influences in their work. Yet in this day and age when information can zip across the world in a flash and become something we all share, I sometimes feel that the music being written kind of sounds the same, no matter what country you're from – that goes for me, too. Like blood coursing through the veins of that region's culture, once you start putting that raw ethnic element into the mix, that's when I feel video game music really gets interesting.

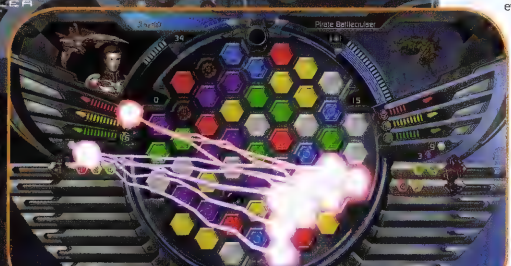
**With titles like Rock Band, Guitar Hero, and Wii Music, gamers are interacting with music more than ever. Do you see this trend affecting your work at all in the future?**
Not really all that much. Still, it'd be a lot of fun to see Wii Music take it up a notch and let you use the controller like a real instrument, or even give you feedback on how well you play the real deal.

**You have several projects going at the moment, from The Black Mages to your work at Dog Ear Records. What aspect of your career are you currently focused on the most right now?**
Obviously I put my all into whatever it happens to be I'm working on at the moment; everything I do in my career is something that I am proud of, but right now what I am really excited about is wrapping up my solo album. On this album I get to write all the songs and lyrics, have them performed by the musicians I picked, and, of course, foot the bill for all that goes into the production myself. People ask, "Why do you run yourself ragged working on an album that's going to make you zilch?" The answer's simple: Because I want to. Just like when I started messing around and making music as a kid some 30 odd years ago, I'm discovering the pure unadulterated pleasure of making music simply because I want to. I'm having a blast!

# impulse

BY MATT MILLER

**Puzzle Quest goes sci-fi, aliens eat everything in sight, and bits find the beat. Retail may be slow, but the download scene is overflowing.**




**This month, I had twice as many great downloadable titles to cover as I have room to talk about on this page. Bad news for me and my relative level of sanity, good news for the downloadable game market. While a steady flow of games has hit Live Arcade, PSN, and WiiWare over the last few months, attention has been rightfully diverted to those huge holiday retail releases. With that rush over, it's like watching rabbits pop out of their holes after a big storm; there are more downloadable games than we can keep track of.**

With that in mind, I'm using this month to highlight a couple of titles flying under the radar. **Puzzle Quest: Galactrix** absorbed an absurd amount of my time this month, leaving me hungering for its release on Live Arcade. The fundamental game structure is the same as Challenge of the Warlords, but the new science-fiction setting introduces a new level of RPG-goodness. You fly your ship around the galaxy, engaging in ship-to-ship battles, mining asteroids, and hacking leap gates to the next system, all while utilizing a new approach to the match-three puzzle mechanic players are familiar with. The multi-colored board shifts in whatever direction you move the gems you find inside. Move a gem left, and new pieces roll in from the right to fill the empty slots. It's just enough variation to be innovative without abandoning the familiar gameplay that made Puzzle Quest work the first time around.

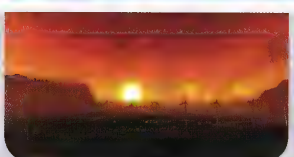



**The Maw** is a relative rarity on Live Arcade, if not a first – a downloadable, fully featured, 3D action/platformer. Consider the popular trope of a boy and his dog, but replace the boy with a tiny blue alien, and replace the dog with an endlessly hungry, ever-growing mouth-creature that absorbs and utilizes the powers of its meals. It sounds strange, but the game's adorable characters and clever level designs are worth a little weirdness. A detachable energy leash keeps you tied to the Maw as he devours everything in sight. While his powers constantly change between fiery breath, helium-like flying, or other unusual abilities, he's always growing larger as the levels progress. Eventually, the mammoth creature fills the screen, but still comes running when you shout, like an obedient pet.

**Bit.Trip Beat** is tough to explain, and our screenshot sure isn't going to help much. Even so, this WiiWare exclusive had half our office playing along with its simple but intriguing premise. For a point of comparison, think Pong, mix in some Rez, and finish it off with a sprinkling of Guitar Hero. As unadorned square bits fly from right to left on the screen, you maneuver your paddle into place by tilting the controller to bounce them back. Complication arrives from the ever-shifting patterns of attacks. Some bits bounce off your paddle and return again. Others enter the screen and then pause for a short time. Observation and pattern recognition become vital as the pace increases. A pumping 8-bit soundtrack keeps beat with the approaching bits, lending a trance-like vibe to the experience. Its extremely retro visuals hide a game that is one of the most innovative to yet arrive on the Wii. It sounds as if Bit.Trip is planned as a series, and Beat is only the first installment. If this one gets some attention, expect some follow-ups in short order. ■■■




## ONESHOTS



**Flower**

Some extended hands-on time with Sony's poetic follow-up to flOw reveals less game and more artistic experiment. Moments of musical meditation in a field of flowers, interposed between scenes of a gray urban landscape, create a moving gameplay experience – even if it evokes derision from more challenge-focused gamers.



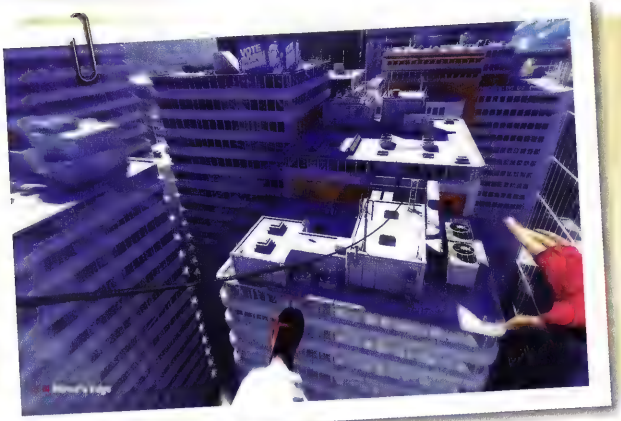
**Flock**

Remember those old "don't drop the silver ball in the hole" tilting games you had as a kid? Flock is like that, but with farm animals that fall off islands and players cast as alien abductors. Stack on a level editor and fans of Lemmings should be in heaven when the game hits Live Arcade and PSN.



**3 on 3 NHL Arcade**

Those who fondly recall the old NES Ice Hockey game have a lot to be excited about in EA's new all-ages hockey title for PSN and Live Arcade. The game groups star players into three broad skill categories, features zany sound effects, and includes on-ice superpowers like goalie shrinking that act as great equalizers.



Gamers

# Man in the Mirror

## Adam Woodcock

**Game Informer scours the leaderboards to find the best of the best, uncover the people behind the handles, and learn their strategies. If you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.**

### Accomplishments:
As of this writing, Adam Woodcock held the number one spot on 17 out of 23 maps on the Mirror's Edge race leaderboards on Xbox Live. He's placed in the top four on the remaining six maps.

### Origin of Skills:
Woodcock was intrigued by Mirror's Edge, so he downloaded the demo and earned both of the world records available. "I thought to myself, 'I could be the best at this game,'" he remembers. "But the thing that drives me to get the records has to be when I used to play Marble Blast Ultra. I would just play until I got first place and I loved doing that, so when I heard about this game I just knew that I could do the same thing if I put my mind to it."

### The Key to Victory:
"I think the most important thing is to figure out all the shortcuts and routes before you start going for the world record," Woodcock says. "There are certain moves you want to avoid on most time trials, like sliding. That wastes so much time. The fastest way to build momentum is stringing moves together, so I try and get creative."

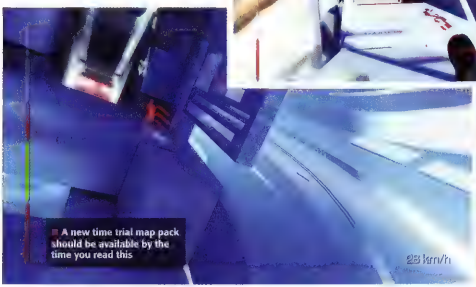
### Practice Time:
Woodcock spent up to 25 hours a week playing Mirror's Edge when he was going for the top scores.

### Life Outside of Mirror's Edge:
Woodcock recently finished school and hopes to get into game testing (DICE, hello? Best time trial guy right here). He also enjoys soccer and boxing.

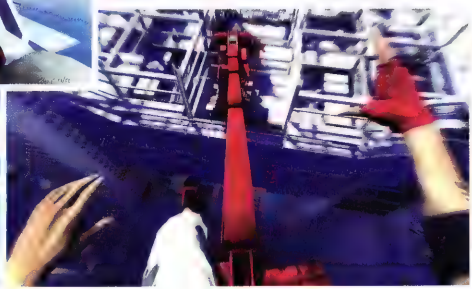
### Other Favorite Games:
Marble Blast Ultra, Halo 3, and Gears of War 2.

### What Should Be in Mirror's Edge 2?
"I definitely want the elevators to be a thing of the past," Woodcock says. "They ruin the flow of Faith and waste so much time. I would like the campaign to be a lot longer and allow the player to have the freedom to go anywhere in the city. I think a race mode should definitely be added, after all, this game is mostly about racing. [And] a level editor would be great."





■ A new time trial map pack should be available by the time you read this



## TIME TRIAL



Adam Woodcock

■ Check out some of Woodcock's time trials at www.youtube/wo0dyx (note the lowercase letter "o" followed by a numerical zero)

**Handle:**
Oo WoOdY oO

**Age:**
18

**Hometown:**
Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

**Favorite Map:**
New Eden

**Most Hated Map:**
Atrium One

**Rivals:**
FAST N BULBOUS, Ninja Infinity



comment

# HEAR NO EVIL

## SONG CENSORSHIP THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Music and censorship go hand in hand. Nowadays, we at least know what we might be missing. Parental warning labels on CDs and non-explicit versions available for sale on iTunes let us choose what we want to be exposed to. But when it comes to video games, the option to choose your listening experience has been taken away. Music games like Rock Band 2 and Guitar Hero World Tour censor the lyrics of their songs, which is understandable given that they are rated T for Teen by the ESRB. But why aren't adults allowed to download M-rated versions of censored songs?

Game Informer talked to Paul DeGooyer, senior vice president of electronic games and music for MTV, who told us via an official statement: "Rock Band is a T-rated game so we prefer to keep it clean. Sometimes this includes 'ducking' some lyrics in songs we've released. However, if we ever encountered a situation where it was important to the artist to have their lyrics remain exactly as they were originally recorded, then we would make it absolutely clear to the consumer that some of the content might be edgy." DeGooyer wouldn't go into specifics about how consumers would be notified in the case of mature content. We also asked DeGooyer if the publisher would offer alternate M-rated downloadable versions of songs, but he didn't respond.

Currently, songs such as The Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Sir Psycho Sexy" simply mute out the offensive content (including on the scrolling lyrics bar), making large sections of the track an instrumental. While singers in Rock Band are free to sing whatever they want in these sections, playing instruments for a song like this without someone to fill in the lyrical gaps creates a disjointed and unenjoyable experience.

Activision Blizzard's Guitar Hero franchise also censors songs, but the company would not return our requests to speak on the topic.

Censorship is understandable for mass-market franchises such as Rock Band and Guitar Hero, but there was some indication during the early development of Rock Band 2 in particular that M-rated, uncensored songs would be available separately – and why shouldn't they be? With downloadable content the norm for music games, it seems like providing age-gated downloads would be an easy way to deal with this situation to satisfy fans who want to sing along with the songs they grew up loving. Console parental control settings could also be employed to help guard underage gamers. On the Xbox 360, a parent would have to manually approve any DLC purchase a child wanted to make that went against the family settings.

This censorship problem exists in spite of an ESRB system designed specifically to alert consumers of content. If a Mature rating could provide sufficient cover for uncensored content, it is likely that the developers and publishers themselves simply choose not to engage the time, effort, and money to offer separate downloads.

Gamers will likely have to get used to this situation. Ballooning development budgets and the need to sell as many copies as possible to recoup these large costs for the sake of profitability casts a haze of self-censorship that appears inevitable. This unfortunately puts video games in contrast to other creative industries, such as music and movies, where content – edgy or otherwise – can exist for its own sake, without the doubt of self-censorship.

## TOP FIVES

**Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers**



**DEVELOPER**
**DENIS BOURDAIN**
**Vice President Business Development, Load, Inc (Things On Wheels)**

1 **Descent – PC**
2 **Re-Volt – PSone**
3 **Command & Conquer – PC**
4 **BioShock – 360**
5 **Things On Wheels – XBLA**



**READER**
**JONATHAN TURNER**
**Pelham, NH**

1 **Star Wars: Battlefront II – PS2**
2 **Star Wars: The Force Unleashed – 360**
3 **Bully: Scholarship Edition – 360**
4 **Star Fox: Assault – GC**
5 **Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare – 360**

*Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:*
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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
*(attach digital picture)*

## TOP TEN

**Lists... Everybody Loves Lists...**

### Top 10 Video Game Bromances

10 ToeJam and Earl (ToeJam and Earl)
9 Cloud and Sephiroth (Final Fantasy VII)
8 Bad Dudes (Bad Dudes)
7 Brucie and Niko (GTA IV)
6 Dante and Vergil (Devil May Cry 3)
5 Bill and Lance (Contra)
4 Marcus and Dom (Gears of War)
3 Bill and Louis (Left 4 Dead)
2 Snake and Otacon (Metal Gear Solid)
1 Sora and Riku (Kingdom Hearts)

Name That Game Answer: Death by Degrees

# DRIVING HOME A DREAM



## Bang Camaro Races From Guitar Hero to the National Stage

A cowbell's familiar clank beckons Bang Camaro to the stage as they rip into '80s-style guitar riffs and complex vocal harmonies courtesy of their so-called "man choir." As the first song comes to a close, one of the lead vocalists asks, "You wanna hear a new one? This song's on Rock Band 2!" The packed house at Minneapolis' 7th Street Entry erupts as the band kicks into "Night Lies," a playable track from Harmonix's music game and also the soundtrack to its closing credits. It's clear there are a lot of fans who came to see the band that's appeared on every Harmonix game since Guitar Hero II.

Bang Camaro's Alex Necochea (left) and Bryn Bennett (right)



While most musicians appear on Rock Band and Guitar Hero because they're already famous, indie bands like Bang Camaro are getting a new kind of interactive exposure that delivers their sound directly to an audience of millions. DragonForce's legendarily difficult "Through the Fire and Flames" from Guitar Hero III saw weekly digital sales explode from roughly 2,000 to a high of 37,825 in the months following the game's release, according to USA Today. The Last Vegas, winners of the Be A Guitar Hero contest for Guitar Hero II, have since released several albums, toured internationally, and will open for Mötley Crüe during their upcoming Saints of Los Angeles tour. Even established bands like Aerosmith are enjoying a resurgence from music games, with Guitar Hero: Aerosmith selling over 567,000 copies in its first week, compared to the band's most recent 2004 album, *Honkin' on Bobo's* 160,500 first week sales.

Bang Camaro has managed to channel their gaming fame into a full-time business, touring North America throughout most of the latter half of 2008, appearing on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, playing with Lynyrd Skynyrd on a cruise ship, and getting their latest album stocked at major retailers like Best Buy and Wal-Mart.

"Bryn [Bennett] and I had been playing in the Boston music scene for awhile and then we found ourselves at a time when his band had broken up and I wasn't really working on much and we just started playing guitar together," recalls co-founder Alex Necochea. "I think we started writing all these weird indie rock songs we were trying to impress each other with."

"Yeah, we're both really sensitive," Bennett adds. Eventually the guys started tinkering with the music of their youth – Metallica, Def Leppard, Ozzy Osborne – and recorded their first song as Bang Camaro with a bunch of lead singers from other Boston bands. They posted "Bang Camaro" on MySpace in 2005 and it took off from there. Fans demanded more songs, so the guys started writing, recording, and releasing tracks every two weeks on "Camaro Thursdays."

**VIDEO GAME APPEARANCES**

- Titan Quest (2006) "Rock of Mages"
- Guitar Hero II (2006) "Push Push (Lady Lightning)"
- Phase (2007) "Nightlife Commando"
- Rock Band (2007) "Pleasure (Pleasure)," "Rock Rebellion" (DLC)
- Rock Band 2 (2008) "Night Lies"

Though Bang Camaro is known mostly for its appearances in music games, the band's gaming debut came in 2006's Titan Quest. Bennett, who worked at developer Iron Lore at the time, was asked if the band could re-envision the main theme for the end credits. "I played Alex the theme song and we were like 'Oh, we can totally metally this,'" Bennett says. "We wrote it, recorded it, and mastered it in like three days to get it in the game. It was ridiculous."

**DISCOGRAPHY**



Bang Camaro (2007)



Bang Camaro II (2008)

Bennett eventually made his way to Harmonix, which proved to be a good career move (Iron Lore shut down in early 2008) and an opportunity for the band's music to be heard outside of the Boston scene. Bang Camaro's heavy sound was perfect for Harmonix's guitar-focused franchise. "Push Push (Lady Lightning)" appeared in Guitar Hero II, followed by "Pleasure (Pleasure)" in the original Rock Band.

Though the band is four for four when it comes to appearing in Harmonix games (including 2007's Phase), they're by no means grandfathered into all future titles. "We try out each time. There are so many bands at Harmonix that not all of them make it in the game, so we've been pretty lucky," Bennett says. "Every time bands literally submit their songs and Eric Brosius, the head sound guy at Harmonix, listens to them all and he's like, 'Hmm, no.' And people get so angry. It's like, 'What the f—, Eric?!' I would not want to be that guy."

So how does Harmonix handle Bennett being gone on tour for months at a time? "They have been ultra cool. Basically they're like 'As long as you work 40 hours when you're in town that's awesome,'" Bennett says. "They try to partition me into little areas that don't affect the rest of the game because I leave for a long time. So I maintain the tutorials, the practice mode, and I wrote the drum trainer along with another guy."

Bennett also performed all of the "rock attitude" motion capture. "I don't get nervous on stage or whatever. I've been doing this for a long time, [but this] was terrifying," Bennett recalls. "They flew me down to New York and I'm in this huge room in a spandex outfit with those ping pong balls on me, with all these people I don't know and they just started blasting songs at different tempos out. They're like '3, 2, 1, rock.' Terrifying."

Even though Harmonix is willing to work around Bennett's touring schedule, the rest of the band has to work around their day jobs. Fortunately, Bang Camaro has 17 active members – most of the them lead singers – so it's not too tough to schedule at least six singers for every show. "We have our own message board," Bennett says. "We keep it private to the band because most of it is about stupid things like girls we think are hot or whatever. But we're like 'This is when we're going out. Who can make it?'"

"It's a little bit of a roll of the dice every time you do it," says singer/software account rep Rodrigo Van Stoll. "But most of us have either jobs that allow us to be flexible or jobs that we're secure enough in that [allow us to] take a certain amount of liberty. And some of us just do whatever it takes."

"Rod actually works on the road," Bennett says. "There'll be times where in the van he's like 'Everyone, shut the f— up!' [switches to serious voice] 'Hi, this is Rodrigo.'"

The singers come from all manners of industry – including accounting and electric car battery R&D. Necochea is the only member whose full-time job is Bang Camaro. He runs Lady Lightning Entertainment, basically the business side of the band, and has no problem offering credit to Harmonix.

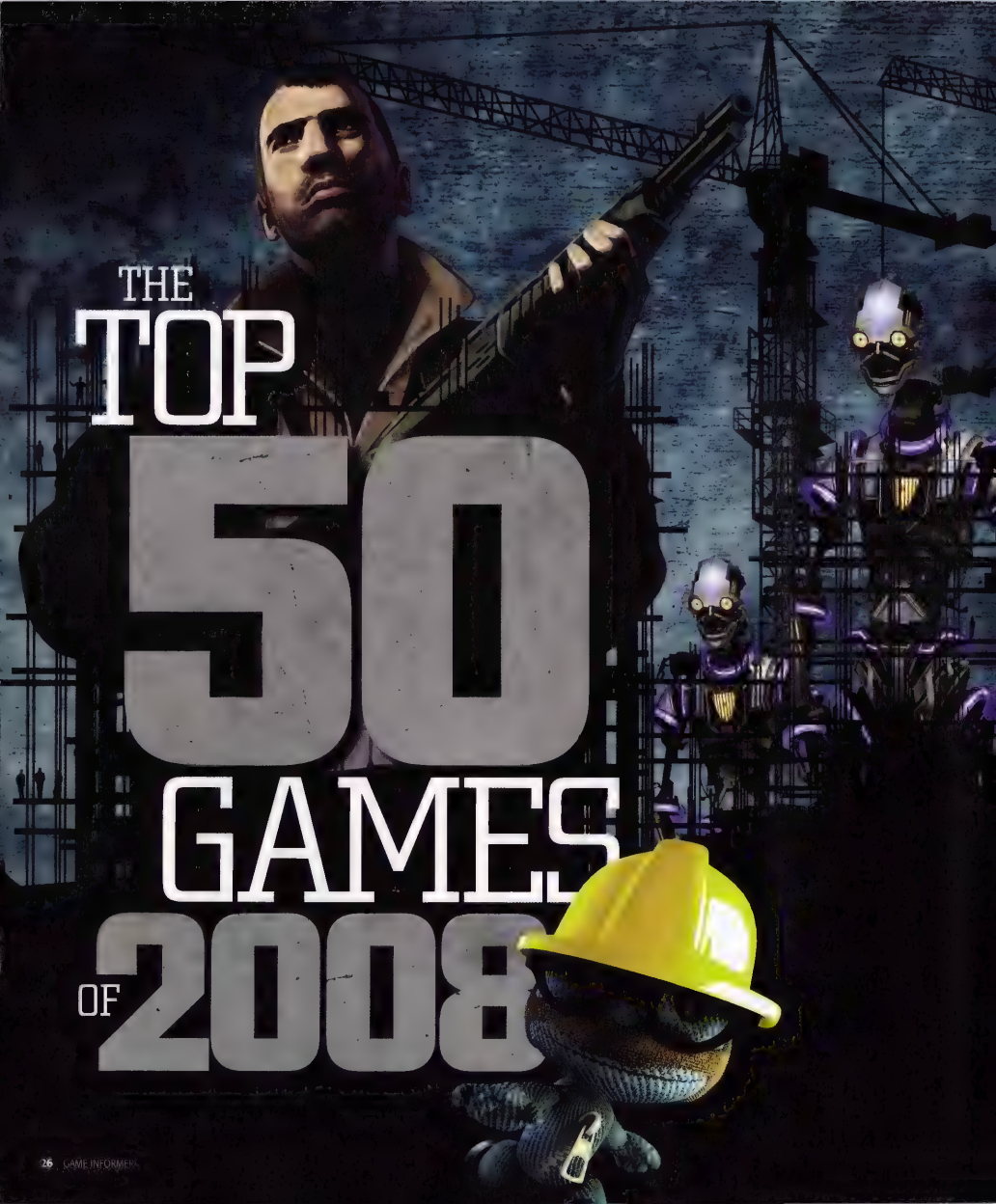
"It's been amazing," Necochea says. "We were in the right place at the right time – having put together this band when Harmonix was putting together Guitar Hero and Guitar Hero II. Since Boston is such a small music scene and Harmonix is staffed largely by local musicians, what we were doing was not going ignored. It seemed like we fit in the niche really well. We are a band that, it's all vocals and all guitar solos, you know? How can this not be the perfect marriage for a video rhythm game?"

"The games just started flying off the shelves and suddenly like millions of people have heard of us," he continues. "We're able to travel all around the country and Canada and people will come to our shows because they know us on the strength of the exposure of [these games]. That's why people come and see us."

**JOIN THE BAND**

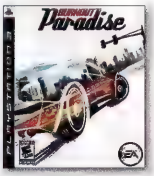
Ever wanted to jump onstage to perform with your favorite band? Most of the time that would result in security tossing your ass out, but Bang Camaro actually recruits local part-timers. "We started in Boston where we would raise [up 9] people on stage and just make it the craziest party ever," says guitarist Bryn Bennett. "We wanted to bring that across the country, but we couldn't fit 20 people in our 15-person van. So we thought 'We'll find local singers in other towns and ask them if they want to do it.'"

Josh Benesh, 25, contacted the band through their website in late 2007, received an instructional DVD in the mail, and joined the band onstage during the last few songs in the set. "It was a blast," says the Andover, MN, native. "This will be my third time with them. I'm not like a regular, but I bring them cookies and beer so they like me."


THE
TOP
50
GAMES
OF
2008



**With each passing year, games continue to evolve and mature as an art form. This year was further proof that gaming truly offers something for everyone. No matter what your tastes, there was an amazing title for you. Grand Theft Auto IV told a rich crime saga on par with a Hollywood film. Left 4 Dead broke new ground in the multiplayer realm with tense, zombie-infested combat. Rock Band and Guitar Hero allowed us to live out our rock star fantasies. Spore and LittleBigPlanet let gamers tap into their creativity, creating their own unique creatures, levels, and worlds, further blurring the line between player and developer. With three successful home consoles, two thriving handhelds, and the ever-present PC, gamers in 2008 had more ways to wile away the hours in a gripping digital adventure than ever. In the following pages, we detail the 50 games that most defined the medium in 2008, pointing the way towards a future that will be even more imaginative and entertaining.**




## BURNOUT PARADISE

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 • **RELEASE:** January 22

Fans of previous Burnout titles may be shocked with the changes Paradise makes to the series formula, but when a game offers blisteringly fast racing in an open world without loading, you don't complain. Paradise City is packed with innumerable challenges, even allowing you to hop online and off with a push of the d-pad. Add in the free downloadable content that includes bikes and weather options, and you'll be too busy racing to miss the old Crash mode.

## DEVIL MAY CRY 4

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** February 5

He may have white hair, carry a gun, and swing a sword, but that isn't Dante. Young upstart Nero steals the spotlight in DMC 4, but the gameplay still revolves around wrecking demons in stylish ways. You're also more mobile thanks to Nero's demonic arm, allowing you to grasp enemies and cut down on time between combos. It seems strange for Devil May Cry poster-boy Dante to relinquish the leading role (he becomes playable later), but Nero is just as skilled in combat – and at throwing out cheesy one-liners.







## SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

**PLATFORM:** PC • **RELEASE:** February 5

Infusing a large-scale space-based RTS with 4X concepts is the heart of Sins of a Solar Empire's brilliance. A round of Sins has a lot more happening on a macro level than most real-time strategy games – from managing multiple deep technology trees to searching for powerful artifacts hidden on your colonies – but the game's outstanding interface keeps everything you need at your fingertips. Massive interstellar battles between fleets of hundreds of ships have never been so entertaining or accessible.

# THE TOP 50 GAMES OF 2008

## PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE

**PLATFORM:** DS
**RELEASE:** February 10

For several weeks after Professor Layton's release, the GI office was abuzz with talk of match-stick rotation, mice breeding rates, and the most efficient manner in which a security guard would patrol a museum. Through its use of amusing characters, fantastic French art style, and accordion-filled soundtrack, Layton proves that all of those brainteasers from grade school can actually be fun when placed in the right context.




## LOST ODYSSEY

**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** February 12

If you can't bear any more spikey-haired heroes or surprise princesses, Lost Odyssey is the role-playing game for you. Developed by Mistwalker, Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's studio, Lost Odyssey blends a sophisticated plot with challenging combat to create an exceptional adventure. The immortal Kaim is an unconventional and compelling protagonist, and the text interludes detailing the 1,000 years of his life open a new dimension of in-game storytelling. Lost Odyssey stays close to many RPG traditions, but it also explores impressive new horizons.




## THE CLUB

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** February 19

**Action shooters rarely see any profound shifts in concept. No matter the setting, the core experience stays the same — take cover, shoot, repeat. Not so with The Club. Sega's upstart shooter takes gun combat in an entirely new direction, forcing gamers to aim for speed on top of accuracy and reflexes as onscreen characters go reeling through timed courses at break-neck pace. Finally put down the controller, and the sense of eye-burning intensity and sharp focus you've just experienced feels as much like Burnout as it does Halo.**






# THE TOP 10 HEROES OF 2008



**1**

**Sackboy** (LittleBigPlanet)

He doesn't talk, and he's not on some grand mission to save the world. In fact, he's pretty much an anthropomorphic Hacky Sack, and yet he's one of the most treasured and lovable protagonists of the year. Sackboy's adorable style and ability to emote pure charisma earn him a special place on this list and inside our hearts.



**2**

**Raiden** (Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots)

Solid Snake, who's no longer fit for battle but soldiers on anyway, deserves some credit, but Raiden's redemption story is more impressive. Kojima's Ninja makeover didn't just turn Raiden into a guy everyone rooted for, it turned him into a super-hero. He may not have much screen time, but whenever Raiden shows up you know something crazy is about to go down.



**3**

**Tim** (Braid)

It only takes a handful of sentences to draw you into Tim's life story. It's a sad tale we can immediately empathize with, but scattered throughout are threads of a deeper meaning. Who is Tim? Who is his princess? And what did he do to her? Uncovering the answers for yourself makes Tim a powerfully relevant character.



**4**

**Faith** (Mirror's Edge)

Sure, Faith has a handler who's constantly in her ear telling her what to do, but when she's scaling skyscrapers it's up to her to improv her way past all obstacles. Faith's intelligence, ability to think quickly on her feet, and non-stop stamina help her survive in the dangerous parkouring world of runners. These skills also make her one of the most compelling new female leads in years.



**5**

**Niko Bellic** (Grand Theft Auto IV)

At first, Niko's just a funny guy with a heavy eastern European accent and poor fashion sense. But the more we learn about him the more we discover a man out of his depth, running from a past full of death. His journey to put his demons to rest speaks to some of the greater ideals our country is founded on. Niko shows us how easy it is to lose your way, and how hard it is to find again.



# GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

**PLATFORM:** PSP • **RELEASE:** March 4

**Even on a small screen, Kratos' fury remains epic. Ready at Dawn Studios successfully condensed the essence of the Ghost of Sparta, resulting in one of the best pure action games of 2008. Using an array of weapons and magic, Kratos mows down mythological beasts – and even gods – with a vengeance. Even without the benefit of two analog sticks, the action is brutal, stylish, and addictive. Chains of Olympus meets the high bar set by its PS2 peers, and is a worthy addition to the God of War mythology.**




## SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

**PLATFORM:** Wii • **RELEASE:** March 9

Nintendo may have left the hardcore audience hanging in 2008, but Brawl's absurd amount of excellent content and rewards is almost single-handedly keeping this group from flipping cop cars and burning Reggie effigies. Cruising through the surprisingly lengthy Subspace Emissary with a friend, collecting endless trophies and stickers, beating Classic mode with every character, and dominating your friends on game night never gets old.

## CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

**RELEASE:** March 11

Possibly one of the most criminally overlooked games on this list, Condemned 2 definitely deserves a second look. Visceral first-person melee combat blends with smart murder investigations and unexpectedly awesome level variety. One minute you're running for your life in a dark, wintry cabin, the next you're jumping through a mad magician's hoops in a BioShock-flavored theater or dodging freaky exploding dolls in a dingy factory.







## RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

**RELEASE:** March 18

Rainbow's second excursion in Sin City makes hitting the casino to gamble seem as boring as playing bingo in a rest home. Why play blackjack when you can toss frag grenades between slot machines and watch the explosive aftermath? Vegas 2 ups the ante with its phenomenal four-player co-op campaign, smarter enemy AI, polished environments that serve as great playgrounds for firefights, and an engaging online multiplayer experience that ranks with the likes of Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4.



6

**The Hero** (Fable II)

What makes a true hero? Is it Love? Compassion? Power? Maybe it's a ruthless determination to be the best. Maybe it's a noble outlook on life and a willingness to stare evil in the eyes no matter the odds. Or maybe it's a fighters spirit that says, "get back up, never back down, and keep fighting." What really makes a Hero? That's for you to decide.



7

**Professor Layton** (Professor Layton and the Curious Village)

Like a modern day Sherlock Holmes, the Professor is smart, intuitive, and a snappy dresser to boot. No matter the problem or riddle we can always count on the Professor to come through. However many times his hapless assistant Luke fails, the Professor is always willing to be patient with the poor lad. That's a true hero.



8

**Fawkes** (Fallout 3)

Super mutants are all dumb, lumbering giants with a limited mindset that tells them you must be destroyed. Except for Fawkes. Fawkes comes along at a crucial moment in the game and saves your life. The smart, funny, and damn near unkillable super mutant is one of the best companions to have while wandering D.C.'s post-apocalyptic wastes.



9

**Kaim** (Lost Odyssey)

When it comes to badass seasoned warriors, Kaim has centuries of experience over everyone else. This 1,000-year-old immortal has real depth and his own tragic but touching history. Mostly, it's just refreshing to see someone in a JRPG who isn't punched out from one of the traditional cookie-cutter stereotypes.



10

**Haggard** (Battlefield: Bad Company)

We're not sure if Haggard is courageous or just stupid, but we admire the man's willingness to jump right into the fight. Haggard is a simple home-cooked American boy, but he's got some of the funniest and most memorable lines in the game, and we have to give props to anyone who's ready to rise up and stand tall for the old rock, flag, and eagle!

# THE TOP 50 GAMES OF 2008

| ESRB BREAKDOWN | |
|---|---|
| E10+ | 8 |
| E | 9 |
| T | 16 |
| M | 17 |

| GENRE BREAKDOWN | |
|---|---|
| Action | 23 |
| RPG | 5 |
| Racing | 5 |
| Strategy | 5 |
| Puzzle | 4 |
| Platform | 2 |
| Sports | 2 |
| Fighting | 2 |
| Music | 2 |

| MONTHLY BREAKDOWN | |
|---|---|
| January | 1 |
| February | 5 |
| March | 4 |
| April | 3 |
| May | 1 |
| June | 5 |
| July | 4 |
| August | 3 |
| September | 7 |
| October | 7 |
| November | 9 |
| December | 1 |

(Release counts are calculated using the first appearance of a game on any platform)

## THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

**PLATFORM:** DS • **RELEASE:** April 22

Stocking up in shops is a staple of the RPG genre, but The World Ends With You takes it to another level. In addition to fighting bad guys in a twisted life-or-death scenario, you need to buy fashionable clothes at trendy stores to increase your effectiveness. The more popular your brands, the better you are in combat. The game also integrates the two DS screens in a cool way: You perform attacks on the bottom screen using stylus motions while simultaneously controlling a partner on the upper screen with the d-pad. It can get crazy, but the charm is hard to resist.




## MARIO KART Wii

**PLATFORM:** Wii • **RELEASE:** April 27

Sure, you don't even have to know what a video game is to play it and have fun, but Mario Kart is a surprisingly deep kart racer that offers players several lines through each course. The new bikes, midair tricks, and half-pipes in this entry are all fantastic additions that give advanced players an edge over noobs -- even if the constant bullet, lightning, and blue shell weapons give it away and keep things interesting. But what's a Mario Kart race without at least one total shakeup of the grid?







## GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

**PLATFORM: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC • RELEASE: April 29**

**Grand Theft Auto's debut on next-generation consoles was worth the wait. The latest version of Rockstar's ode to America's fascination with violence, consumerism, and crime features the most likable protagonist yet in Niko Bellic, an Eastern European immigrant fresh off the boat looking to find the American Dream. What he finds instead is a sprawling Liberty City rife with strip clubs, gang bangers, organized crime, corrupt cops, hookers, and the most colorful cast of characters in a GTA game yet. This bastardized version of New York City is a bountiful playground for gamers, featuring refined gunplay mechanics, vehicular mayhem, realistic physics, and a great new multiplayer mode that lets friends wreak havoc across the city together. Story, graphics, gameplay, multiplayer — Grand Theft Auto IV delivers on every level, and for this we name it the 2008 Game of the Year.**

GAME OF THE YEAR 2008

# THE TOP 10 MOMENTS OF 2008




**Making Stuff** – The Games Of 2008

This year was the first time that average users took control of games and began crafting their experiences. Modders have been riffing off of existing games for years. But when thousands of players are composing songs on Guitar Hero, crafting their own LittleBigPlanet levels, or creating creatures in Spore, the era of user-created content has arrived.




**Tranquility Lane** – Fallout 3

Who knew a *Leave it to Beaver*-style black-and-white neighborhood could survive a nuclear apocalypse? Fallout 3 sends players into a surreal world of '50s Americana, only to pull away the curtain and reveal the dark truth behind the façade. With the strangely familiar dog running around the playground, and the option to become the fabled Pint-Sized Slasher, this interlude had more than its share of surprises.



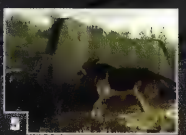

**Finding The Princess** – Braid

After hours of mind-bending puzzles, players finally get a fleeting glimpse of the princess that Tim has sought since the game began. Nothing is as it first appears, however, and Tim's story suddenly takes on a drastically different meaning as you look, think, and step back through that last, fiendishly brilliant level.




**Down Memory Lane** – Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots

For the true MGS aficionado, no place holds more significance than Shadow Moses. When a haunted and aged Solid Snake sets foot back on the familiar base, players are flooded with familiar sights and sounds that recall the years of stealthy missions and convoluted international conspiracies they've shared with the old soldier.




**Release The Hounds** – Call Of Duty: World At War

Air strikes are cool, but not even cluster bombs have the punch of sending out a ravenous pack of attack dogs to decimate your foes. The ultimate multiplayer perk, seven kills earns you the ability to unleash this devastating dog assault. If you're at the receiving end, nothing can make you quite so frantic as the sound of those baying canines charging your trench.




## BOOM BLOX

**PLATFORM:** Wii
**RELEASE:** May 6

Whether or not Steven Spielberg helped create this game is irrelevant when the final product is this good. It looks like a kids' game, but the challenging physics puzzles will amuse players of any age. Even though it's not necessarily billed as a multiplayer game, it's great for parties. Possibly more than any other Wii game, Boom Blox shows the precision and tactile feel that gamers have expected out of the motion controls since the console was announced.




## GRID

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** June 3

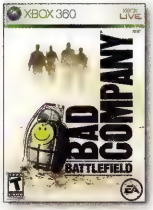
Some say nothing new can be done in the world of racing, but Grid proves that theory wrong. Grid's Flashback feature (which lets you rewind your race back to before a crash) and smart opponent AI keep races fresh. Similarly, the different race types and career obligations – including juggling sponsors and teammates – give a new twist to the traditional career structure and show that developer Codemasters is just as good at reinventing its wheel as it is at refining its finely tuned racing principles.




## NINJA GAIDEN II

**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** June 3

Ninja Gaiden spits out more bloody limbs than a McDonald's meat processing plant, but it's the game's ability to create a bedlam of nonstop rhythmic action that leaves us on a perpetual adrenaline high. This combat-heavy series has always been known for its difficulty, but thanks to a new health recharge system, better checkpoints, and a larger arsenal of gruesome weapons, this Gaiden was much more user friendly.




## BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** June 23

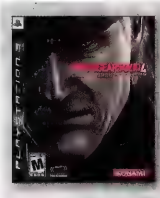
With Bad Company, DICE finally kisses crappy single-player bot matches goodbye. This console-exclusive strikes gold with its polished sandbox style single-player campaign, destructible environments, and the amazing vehicle and weapon arsenals (golf cart + missile launcher = endless entertainment). Tack on Battlefield's stellar bread and butter multiplayer featuring persistent rankings and unlockable weapons and you have one of the best shooters of the year.




## FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT

**PLATFORM:** Nintendo DS
**RELEASE:** June 24

This sequel to the GBA original solves many of that game's frustrations and gives fans a tremendous amount of content to chew on. The excellent job system and the nearly endless battle variety make FF Tactics A2 a must for any strategy/RPG fan. Finding ability combinations that take your crew's wrecking potential to the limit is rarely as amusing as it is here – invisible ninja/snipers with sweet elemental magic are simply awesome.




## METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3 • **RELEASE:** June 12

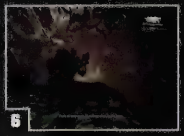
Snake completes his final mission with all of the electrifying action and shocking plot twists fans could hope for. MGS 4 combines the series' signature elements with new innovations; the boss fights are fantastic, the cinematics are awe-inspiring, and the gameplay provides a new degree of flexibility. MGS 4 also succeeds in tying together the numerous loose ends of the series, forming a bittersweet conclusion to the saga of Solid Snake.




## CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, DS
**RELEASE:** July 8

Adapting one of the more complex PC genres to work on gamepads sounds silly (see: real-time strategy), but Firaxis pulled it off by distilling the core brilliance of the seminal Civilization series and presenting it in a colorful wrapper. Civ Rev hits all the high points of its older cousins – clashing world-spanning cultures, grand global warfare, and the rest of the broad strokes of recorded human history – without miring players in the details.



6

**The Worm** – Gears Of War 2

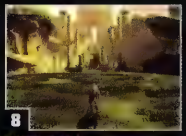
It's the bloodiest, nastiest thing we've ever seen in high definition, and it's also the most thrilling moment in Epic's blockbuster sequel. As Marcus Fenix chainsaws his way through membrane and artery, the threat of danger is everywhere. When that debris wall starts rolling forward, players learn just how important the roadie run can really be.



7

**Holding Down The Fort** – Left 4 Dead

The zombies could strike at any moment. You're low on health. There are too many windows to cover them all, and that's not even counting all the entrances upstairs. Maybe if everybody just stays together, then, oh no! They're breaking through the wall! They've pulled somebody outside! There's too many!



8

**Parental Neglect** – God Of War: Chains Of Olympus

No one said being the god of war was going to be easy. As Kratos arrives in the Fields of Elysium, he sees his long-dead daughter waiting for him. As she begs for him to stay, Kratos must push the little girl away and soldier on. Forget deadly monsters and traps, the greatest blockade to victory is the heart-wrenching cries of Kratos' helpless child.



9

**Bear!** – Condemned 2: Bloodshot

While wandering a decrepit old house to the sight of bloodstains and the sound of distant roars, a huge grizzly bear smashes through the wall and charges you. Fleeing through tight corridors and collapsing stairways, in the end it's one shotgun shell that stands between you and a horrible death. The game's advice for the encounter? "Run for your life!!!"




10

**Put Away Your Notepad** – Professor Layton And The Curious Village

If you've got out a pen and paper, you're probably doing something wrong. Time and again, the Curious Village demands puzzle solutions that seem infinitely more complicated than they actually are. When you stop to think, you realize the elegantly simple answer has been staring you in the face the entire time.

# THE TOP 50 GAMES OF 2008




## SOULCALIBUR IV

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** July 29

Next-gen Soulcalibur delivers everything we had hoped for from our beloved fighting series – great fighting graphics that more than live up to the franchise's pedigree, and a single-player campaign finally worth playing. Most importantly, the character creator is the most compelling addition to the genre since finishing moves. Unlocking the hundreds of items to either outfit the existing fighters or create your own warriors from scratch has us enthralled with Soulcalibur all over again.




## BRAID

**PLATFORM:** Xbox Live Arcade • **RELEASE:** August 6

Jonathan Blow's remarkable platforming puzzler is a serious change of pace in a year otherwise dominated by cinematic explosions and action-packed combat. Braid's singular pacing and existential narrative grab your attention, but the endlessly clever level design is the real revelation. By warping time, players encounter puzzles that endlessly require creative problem solving. The fact that the story, puzzles, and the artistic presentation all tie together so well is just icing on the cake.




## NCAA FOOTBALL 09

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** July 15

While the gameplay does little to distinguish itself from past college football games, NCAA Football 09 earns its place among the best games of the year due to its innovative online dynasty mode. Large-scale multiplayer online experiences are the future of sports games, and competing against up to 11 other football minds for blue chip recruits, AP poll rankings, and national titles in this groundbreaking mode is a noble first step.




## GEOMETRY WARS RETRO EVOLVED 2

**PLATFORM:** Xbox Live Arcade
**RELEASE:** July 30

Sometimes it's the little things that make the difference. The basic formula for Geometry Wars 2 doesn't change the addictive excitement established by its predecessor, it just makes it better. Four-player co-op and competitive options are the most heralded additions, but the expansion of gameplay into six unique game modes keeps even solo players blasting those infuriating geometric shapes for hour after time-lost hour.




## N+

**PLATFORM:** Xbox Live Arcade, PSP, DS
**RELEASE:** August 26

N+ is a no-frills platformer, but its levels require such pinpoint skill that we're almost grateful the game isn't burdened with a worthless story. Growing from its roots as a free flash PC game, the Xbox Live Arcade version has a more stylized design, tons of new levels, and three different multiplayer modes. Handheld owners can also get in on the action with unique versions of the crafty platformer on the PSP and DS.




## CASTLE CRASHERS

**PLATFORM:** Xbox Live Arcade
**RELEASE:** August 27

Even as Castle Crashers lampoons the traditions of the side-scrolling brawler, it's clear just how much fondness the creators at Behemoth have for the genre. A bombastic art style of crazy cartoons leads the way for the four-player insanity in this download-only gem. The game is filled with hilarious bosses, seemingly endless unlocks, varied levels, and more cheap jokes than you'll know what to do with. It's a great achievement from a small team of developers, and a guaranteed blast to play with friends in 2008.

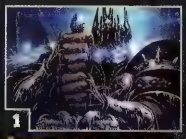



## SPORE

**PLATFORM:** PC
**RELEASE:** September 7

A game claiming to give you the power to create life and control your own universe might sound like it's over-promising. It isn't, as long as the game is Spore. This title from The Sims' mastermind Will Wright allows you to shape a species through multiple phases of evolution, with results varying from horrifying to hilarious. An amazingly intuitive interface allows you to design creatures, buildings, vehicles, and spaceships to share with other users, resulting in an ever-expanding community experience.

# THE TOP 10 VILLAINS OF 2008



1

### Arthas (World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King)

Even when Arthas was just a prince there was something a little unstable about the guy. Then he snapped, killed his father in cold blood, and got himself possessed by an evil spirit. Not only is he malevolent and powerful, but Arthas' motives are about as clear-cut sinister as they get: he wants to extinguish all life.



2

### President John Henry Eden (Fallout 3)

The calm, authoritative voice that comes across your radio in the early hours of Fallout belies the maniacal ethnic-cleansing schemes of its owner. The President's inability to express anger is more unnerving than anything else, and meeting him face-to-face and discovering who's really running our country is one of the most chilling moments of the game.



3

### Smokers (Left 4 Dead)

If getting bombarded from all sides by flesh eaters wasn't terrifying enough, the smokers appear and change the rules of the game. They attack quickly and from a distance – usually from out of nowhere – quickly immobilizing you, and separating you from your group. There aren't many things scarier than being dragged up the side of a building and realizing there's nothing you can do to save yourself.



4

### The Jackal (Far Cry 2)

This intelligent, immoral, Nietzsche-quoting arms dealer plays both sides, leaving his true intentions mysterious. The Jackal has plenty of opportunities to kill you, but he not only spares your life, he saves it. Since he's clearly pulling everyone's strings like a skilled puppeteer, you're left to wonder, how's he playing you?



5

### Beauty and the Beast Corps (Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots)

There is something tragically poetic about scarred beauty. That is the premise behind these four beautiful women who've been disfigured in battle and transformed into machines of destruction. As you fight these cybernetic monsters, you discover that the bigger tragedy is that their scarring isn't just physical.




## ROCK BAND 2

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, PlayStation 2
**RELEASE:** September 14

Following its breakout success last year, Rock Band 2 gives rockers exactly what they want: a streamlined, expanded, and improved career mode, plus a ton of great new songs. While the second generation hardware (especially the drums) are welcome, Rock Band 2's real success is how it seamlessly implements downloaded tracks and the disc content from the original Rock Band, resulting in the ultimate interactive digital jukebox.




## STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** September 16

This is how using the Force should feel. Whether you're zapping stormtroopers with lightning or decimating Wookiees as Darth Vader, The Force Unleashed taps into the power of the Force like never before. The story of Darth Vader's secret apprentice is interesting, but the real focus is on becoming a one-man catastrophe. Great physics and reactive environments make the world respond to your every whim, and the cascading destruction that results is a joy to behold.




## CRYSIS WARHEAD

**PLATFORM:** PC
**RELEASE:** September 16

Crysis Warhead holds a distinct advantage over its critically acclaimed predecessor — most PCs can actually run it. Gamers without rigs boasting quad-core processors and four video cards can finally experience the thrill of hunting down patrol units with the aid of a speed boosting, strength enhancing, cloak enabling nano-suit. Warhead blends the sandbox gameplay of the original title with large-scale set-pieces that up the wow factor during firefights, resulting in the best PC-exclusive shooter of the year.




## PURE

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** September 16

Pure knows how to nail a trick. The game delivers high-speed racing, mammoth jumps in varied courses, and tricks that are both easy to pull off and heart-stopping to see. All three elements blend together seamlessly, never letting you catch your breath during a race. The MX vs. ATV and MotorStorm franchises may have the name recognition, but Pure is the game for adrenaline junkies looking for an unadulterated fix.




## CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION

**RELEASE:** PC
**RELEASE:** September 22

This remake of one of Sid Meier's earlier masterpieces is a great update to a beloved memory. Balancing diplomatic, military, and religious contact with the natives against expansion of your infrastructure and the constant demands of your King is a fantastic one-off from standard 4X gameplay. Colonization provides a very different and very compelling set of challenges to even the most dedicated armchair emperor.




## NHL 09

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** September 9

This year's NHL title is simply the best hockey game ever made. By striking a great balance between skill moves and good old-fashioned grit, featuring the best incarnation of EA's Be a Pro mode, and delivering an awesome multiplayer online component that lets you create a team with your friends for six-on-six hockey, NHL 09 has all the ingredients to hoist the Cup.




## DEAD SPACE

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** October 14

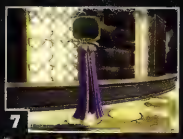
Dismemberment is the new headshot. As an engineer aboard a derelict freighter, Dead Space has players use a plasma cutter to shred the arms, legs, and torsos off terrifying alien foes. When you aren't being assaulted from all sides, you're treated to tense atmosphere; necromorphs can lurk around any corner, and corpses are rarely as dead as they look. With its mix of harrowing combat and brilliant scare tactics, Dead Space brings real fear back to survival horror.



6

### The King
(Civilization IV: Colonization)

So you're busy building up your cities, dealing with the natives, and managing your settlement's resources. You've got your hands full; you're running a civilization. Then the King shows up and demands tribute just before raising taxes. You could fight him, but his armies and ships are always better than yours. "Long live the king," your a--.



7

### Lord of All Games
(Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts)

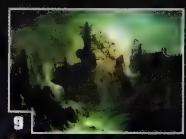
While plenty of antagonists are arrogant, not many of them are this funny. L.O.G. unabashedly takes credit for every good and bad thing that's ever happened in video games, and while it's obvious that he's calculating something from the start of the game, you're never really sure what his grand plans are. Still, L.O.G.'s greatest sin is probably his terrible fashion sense.



8

### Heat-Seeking Missiles (No)

As soon as you saw that a level had one of these missile launchers you knew you were going to have to pay your dues. Navigating N+'s levels already takes a certain level of dexterity, but these heat seekers stick so close to your tail that they rob you of any opportunity to ponder your next move. You either run like mad or watch your ninja splat across the screen.



9

### Ahriman (Prince of Persia)

We never really get to see the true form of this dark god, and that left our imaginations with a lot of unnerving implications. Even after being imprisoned for untold ages, aspects of this demon leaked into the world and corrupted it. But its most impressive act of villainy is forcing your own character into decisions you'll never be comfortable with.




10

### Greyfield
(Advance Wars: Days of Ruin)

Greyfield is the commander of the New Rubinelle Army, but he's too obsessed with fighting an old war that he only breeds more conflict. Even though you team up with him for a short time, you're constantly at odds. Then again, anyone ruthless enough to use a super weapon that destroys entire cities just to get at one man isn't someone you really want at your side.

# THE TOP 50 GAMES OF 2008




## FABLE II

**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360 • **RELEASE:** October 21

Fable II lives up to its namesake by providing a gorgeous world to explore, a variety of missions to tackle, and often-hilarious writing. Whether you're settling down with a family or setting out on a lifelong quest for vengeance, this enchanting sequel offers something for everyone. There's nothing particularly valiant about playing with your dog or managing properties, but in the midst of combat Fable II makes you feel like a real hero.




## LITTLEBIGPLANET

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3 • **RELEASE:** October 27

After LittleBigPlanet, no one can say that 2D platforming is an antiquated genre. Media Molecule (along with mascot Sackboy) reinvigorates the traditional run-and-jump genre with inventive levels, realistic physics, and four-player co-op. The full set of creation tools included in the game opens the floodgates for user-generated objects and levels to keep you playing long after you finish the main campaign. For creativity, charm, and sheer cleverness, LittleBigPlanet can't be beat.




## SAINTS ROW 2

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

**RELEASE:** October 14

Saints Row will always live in the shadow of GTA, but if you kick up your feet and crack a cold one, you'll find that it's pretty nice in the shade. The game eschews grand drama for high farce – it's a violent, gonzo cartoon in every respect. It's deep customization options, co-op career mode, complex set pieces, and greater mission activity variety make this a great supplement to GTA IV. This guilty pleasure delivers exactly as it should.




## MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

**RELEASE:** October 20

The original open-world racer came back in a big way in 2008. Using the PS3 and 360 to their fullest, Midnight Club: Los Angeles recreates a shockingly large digital L.A., then turns players loose with a host of blazingly fast cars and cycles. Although it's not a huge step beyond the last version, the finely tuned controls, immaculately designed city layout, and myriad customization options makes this the most pure fun racing game this year.




## GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, PlayStation 2

**RELEASE:** October 26

Guitar Hero III may not have innovated the music genre, but Neversoft came out swinging with Guitar Hero: World Tour. The game features new instruments, including a fresh drum kit (with cymbals!) and an innovative touchpad guitar. World Tour wins over doubters with its diverse soundtrack, star power cameos, and the groundbreaking GHTunes studio mode, which allows players to create original rock epics.




## FALLOUT 3

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation3, Xbox 360, PC • **RELEASE:** October 28

War may never change, but Fallout certainly can. Unafraid to innovate where necessary and embrace the old where appropriate, Bethesda's re-imagination offers hours of intriguing wandering through the post-nuclear wasteland of Washington D.C. Blending the traditions of first-person shooting and RPG story development, Fallout 3 surpasses genre expectations with a world so dense with characters and quests that it is hard to know where to start. Once you get your bearings, it delivers one of the most engrossing and choice-driven gameplay experiences of the year.



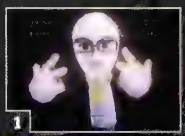

## CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

**RELEASE:** November 4

It may not match the majesty of Call of Duty 4, but World At War delivers enough thrills to shoot its way into the top 50. Using the gorgeous COD 4 engine and multiplayer system as a backbone, Treyarch squeezes some life out of the stale World War II genre by combining the greatest hits moments of past Call of Duty titles with genuine new experiences like repelling banzai ambushes, torching bunkers with a flamethrower, and unleashing a furious pack of dogs on your enemies during multiplayer.

# THE TOP 10 DORKS OF 2008



1

**The Rapper** (We Music)

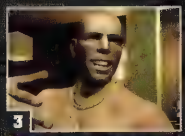
As the worst thing in one of the year's worst games, the rapper is among the lowest points in gaming history. If you don't believe us, try singing (loudly!) the syllables "Yo! Ya-yo! Cha! Yo! Be-be!" in a high chipmunk voice to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." Is that a game? Nope. It's just unbearable.



2

**Jet Brody** (Fracture)

If there were a computer that created generic action heroes, Jet Brody would have emerged from its cold, mechanical womb with no fanfare or circumstance. Even having the worst name in gaming history can't save this buffoon from obscurity. Jet Brody? Is that some kind of surfing airplane?



3

**Brucie** (Grand Theft Auto 4)

Brucie was probably the most popular guy in his high school, and he tried to keep the magic alive with shark hormones and lame catchphrases like "that's how we roll." Too bad for Brucie that grown men acting like adolescent alpha males aren't as cool as they think they are. But they are hilarious.



4

**Travis Touchdown** (No More Heroes)

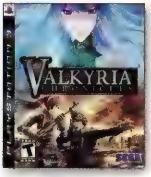
Travis is like a huge dork buffet, where you can pick any number of crippling personality flaws. He swings a store-brand lightsaber, sits on the toilet to save the game, and can barely hold down a part-time job carrying coconuts. If you identify with this loser, you have problems.



5

**Jansen** (Lost Odyssey)

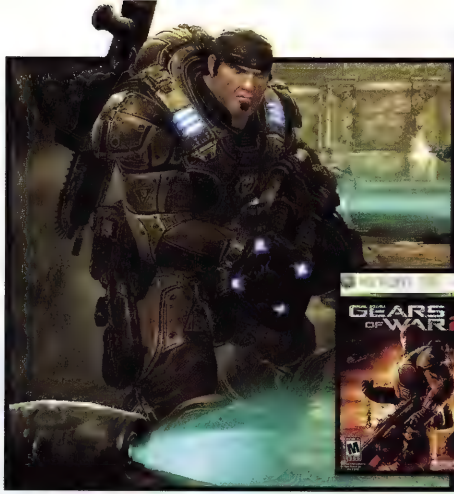
Ugh, Jansen. He looks like a girl, needs a sitcom-style groan machine for his stale jokes, and is oblivious to the fact that everyone around him thinks he totally sucks. He claims to be successful with the ladies, but we're pretty sure magic spells were involved every time he's scored.




## VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3
**RELEASE:** November 4

Tactical role-playing games are typically confined to grids, but Valkyria Chronicles breaks the mold and gets players right down in the action. While you'll use a strategic map for decision making, every shot fired and grenade lobbed happens in real time and third-person, eliminating the genre's usual detachment from the combat. It also provides a better view of the battlefield, which is full of stunning visuals thanks to the game's beautiful art style.






## GEARS OF WAR 2

**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** November 7

**Whether you're into heated online competition or team-building cooperative play, Gears of War 2 has you covered with its airtight mechanics and superlative presentation. The epic campaign delivers set-piece battles that are second to none, and several creative multiplayer modes take advantage of the game's unique cooperative mechanics. If you want blockbuster action and pretty explosions, it doesn't get better than this.**

## RESISTANCE 2




**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3
**RELEASE:** November 4

This massive adventure isn't content delivering a single gameplay experience. Resistance 2 breaches your PS3 with a frantic single-player campaign that delivers titanic boss fights and a complex plot, a competitive mode that boasts huge 60-person battles, and an independent cooperative mode that allows up to eight players to tackle randomized challenges that dynamically react to your group size. This triple threat amounts to one of the standout releases for the powerful PlayStation 3.

## BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS




**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** November 11

Expressing your creativity isn't just a healthy exercise; it's also addictive fun. Plenty of games provide players with the tools to create interesting content, but Nuts & Bolts excels with its hearty vehicle creation system. Rare's open-ended approach to missions and willingness to lampoon itself give you plenty of reason to revisit Banjo's cartoony world.

## MIRROR'S EDGE




**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
**RELEASE:** November 12

When it comes to first-person platforming, not even Samus can keep up with Mirror's Edge's starlet, Faith. With its kinetic *Run Lola Run* inspired gameplay, this game trades the thrills of first-person gunplay for stomach-dropping leaps between skyscrapers at nauseating heights. The tension of evading enemy fire while vaulting, climbing, and jumping across a sun-drenched city is one of the most memorable and innovative experiences of the year.



6

**Those Dudes** (Army of Two)

Oh, you don't remember their names either. The only thing that stands out about these muscleheads is their terrible banter, which is about 90 percent f-bombs and 10 percent confusing idioms. What exactly is "don't piss on my cupcakes" supposed to mean? Is it a euphemism?



7

**Akira** (Metal Gear Solid 4)

Forget Raiden -- there's a new punching bag in town. It doesn't matter if you're a member of an elite military unit, or if you can shoot a high-tech sniper rifle with unerring accuracy. If you spend an entire combat mission crapping yourself repeatedly, you are an embarrassment.



8

**Opoona** (Opoona)

Just look at him! He looks like a cross between a Playmobile guy and a dumber, more deformed Playmobile guy. That stupid thing above his head is called an "energy bon-bon," which he kind of uses to attack when he isn't performing pointless jobs for random idiots.



9

**Gabriel Nowak** (Rainbow Six Vegas 2)

A terrorist mastermind isn't very threatening when his final monologue makes him sound like a fussy three-year-old. "Waaah! When I was a part of Rainbow Team, you always protected me and never gave me any responsibility, so I decided to become a terrorist!" Jeez, grow a pair, Nowak.



10

**Billy Corgan** (Guitar Hero World Tour)

Remember when Billy Corgan was cool? Neither do we, but he was on *The Simpsons* once, so that's something. In a less impressive cameo, he also appears in Guitar Hero World Tour as a kilt-wearing nancyboy. Despite all his rage, he is still just a dork in a cage.

# Top 10

## Developers of 2008

**1 Media Molecule** (Last Year: N/A)
When LittleBigPlanet debuted, gamers drooled over the so-cute-it-hurts graphics and the promise of user-generated content. In the face of unprecedented expectations for a fledgling developer, Media Molecule didn't flinch, producing one of the most endearing, imaginative, and innovative games of this generation and empowering gamers to create and share their own works of art.

**2 Harmonix** (Last Year: N/A)
Harmonix achieved the unprecedented in game development, turning Rock Band into a full-fledged service by showering faux-rockers with a refined user interface, backwards compatibility with the original Rock Band, weekly song releases, and an amazing community web site.

**3 Rockstar North** (Last Year: N/A)
Rockstar left no stone of modern American culture untumed in GTA IV, lampooning everything from the creepy desperation of dating services to the vapidity of modern television. The game's tightened gunplay, frenzied multiplayer, and bastardized homage to New York City and the American dream once again raises the bar of immersive game design.

**4 Blizzard** (Last Year: N/A)
Blizzard doesn't just make great games; the games generate enough revenue to rival the GDP of some third-world countries. The wildly successful WOW shows no signs of slowing its money-printing operations following Wrath of the Lich King, which is bringing untold numbers of relapsed WOW fans back to its servers.

**5 Valve** (Last Year: 6)
Left 4 Dead's frantic teammate-based gameplay is the multiplayer experience of the year. What else do you expect from the endlessly talented Valve Software? The company also expanded its successful Steam download service to include most every major PC release of 2008.

**6 DICE** (Last Year: N/A)
Its shaky console past aside, DICE struck gold with Battlefield: Bad Company and Mirror's Edge. Bad Company delivers the series' famed multiplayer to console gamers, and the bold new approach to first-person platforming in Mirror's Edge is jaw dropping.

**7 Epic Games** (Last Year: N/A)
Epic indeed. Unreal Engine 3 continues to be the platform of choice for most development houses, and Epic's premiere franchise, Gears of War 2, sold 2.1 million copies at launch, placing it in the rare company of Halo and Grand Theft Auto.

**8 Ubisoft Montreal** (Last Year: 4)
Not many studios can boast making four good games in one year. With Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Prince of Persia, Far Cry 2, and the underrated Naturo: The Broken Bond, Montreal's crown jewel of game development showed it can handle quantity *and* quality.

**9 Bethesda Softworks** (Last Year: N/A)
Fanboys cried foul when Bethesda debuted Fallout's bold new direction, but the studio delivered, garnering universal praise from the gaming press. Its boldly realized vision of a post-apocalyptic United States is a triumph of the role-playing genre.

**10 Kojima Productions** (Last Year: N/A)
Hideo Kojima's development ninjas evolved the Metal Gear Solid franchise with new controls and fresh ways to play the game without sacrificing the spirit of Solid Snake. Not even fanboys called foul over the alterations – a rare feat indeed.

## Publishers of 2008

**1 Electronic Arts** (Last Year: 2)
Electronic Arts deserves this year's top spot. Why? Simply, they put out the most good games. More encouraging was the company's new emphasis on new IP, which showed in the form of great games like Dead Space, Spore, and Mirror's Edge and its acquisition of BioWare and Pandemic.

**2 Activision** (Last Year: 4)
With Call of Duty and Guitar Hero, Activision already had two of the industry's hottest and acclaimed franchises. Then halfway through the year, a merger with Vivendi transformed the publishing giant, adding World of Warcraft to its arsenal.

**3 Microsoft Game Studios** (Last Year: 1)
Microsoft continued to excel as a publisher, giving the hardcore Xbox 360 crowd not one but two blockbuster sequels – Gears of War 2 and Fable II. Even Rare delivered with Banjo Kazooie and Viva Piñata. Perhaps most important was Xbox Live Arcade, which flowered into a viable distribution channel.

**4 Ubisoft** (Last Year: 7)
Ubisoft always delivers a great slate of games, balancing new IP and iterations of existing franchises. This year was no different, seeing new Brothers in Arms, Prince of Persia, and Rainbow Six titles. It also was one of the few third parties to develop a real franchise on the Wii (Rayman Raving Rabbids). Even its duds were inventive, like EndWar and Far Cry 2.

**5 Take Two** (Last Year: N/A)
Take Two always comes under fire from the SEC and the ESRB, but it's talented enough to pull through. Of course, when you've got a little title called Grand Theft Auto IV in your lineup – not to mention two stellar Civ products – you'll always be able to talk your way out of trouble.

**6 Nintendo** (Last Year: 3)
While we've been critical of Nintendo's recent output, there's no denying that the company is one of the most capable publishers. While its new audience has been served by clever products like Wii Fit, Professor Layton, and Personal Trainer: Cooking, overlook its hardcore games as Mario Kart Wii, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, and Advance Wars: Days of Ruin at your peril.

**7 Sony Computer Entertainment** (Last Year: 5)
Sony's catalogue is a superb mix of bankable blockbusters like Resistance, God of War, and SOCOM and left-field cult hits like Echochrome and Patapon. Throw in casual standbys like Singstar and Hot Shots Golf, and you've got yourself a spot in our top ten. Sony's best title this year, LittleBigPlanet, showed off all three sides of its personality.

**8 Valve** (Last Year: N/A)
Valve's "quality over quantity" philosophy results in groundbreaking games like this year's hit Left 4 Dead. No publisher in the world can take a good concept and polish it to perfection like Valve.

**9 MTV Games** (Last Year: N/A)
MTV Games has managed to turn Rock Band into more than just a series of games – its comucopia of downloadable tracks has transformed the game into a music service in the vein of Apple's iTunes, pointing the way towards a bright future.

**10 Capcom** (Last Year: N/A)
Capcom thrived in 2008 with Devil May Cry 4, one of the best entries in the storied series. It's also worth noting Capcom's great downloadable games like Bionic Commando Rearmed, Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix, and Mega Man 9.

## WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING




**PLATFORM:** PC • **RELEASE:** November 13

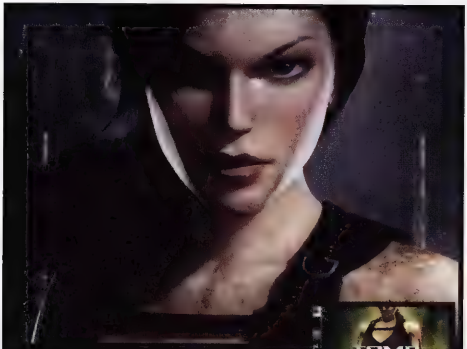
Blizzard's still got it. This latest World of Warcraft expansion one-ups the game's previous content once again. Epic solo and small-group questlines give players the opportunity to see changes occur to the world around them, new arenas and competitive scenarios give the Horde a new set of reasons to slaughter the Alliance, and the new loot and abilities for every variation of every character class are tons of fun to browse. WotLK confirms it again – WoW is king, and the rest of the MMOs are just pretenders.




## LEFT 4 DEAD

**PLATFORM:** Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** November 17

**It's easy to make fun of protagonists in horror titles who make stupid decisions, but when you're facing down hordes of flesh hungry zombies, your shotgun just belched its last shell, and your cornered buddies are screaming for help, a poor decision is only a flustered split-second away. L4D's ability to craft such harrowing environments makes it the standout multiplayer experience of the year.**



# TOMB RAIDER UNDERWORLD

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** November 18

**Lara Croft's latest adventure continues the quality streak established in the last two installments. Crystal Dynamics ups the drama with explosive events like the destruction of Croft manor, and expands the scope of its levels with Titanic-sized puzzles. Lara's 3D platforming feels more responsive and varied than ever, and the visually rich backdrops of ancient tombs deliver thrilling opportunities to leap and climb to victory.**

## PRINCE OF PERSIA

**PLATFORM:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
**RELEASE:** December 2

Ubisoft Montreal threw its iron back in the fire, crafting a Prince of Persia franchise for a new generation. This innovative and stirring fantasy adventure is replete with romance and cinematic action. By offering an open route to game completion, the game enables players to tackle challenges in any order. Smooth traversal mechanics and movie-like combat duels never cease to be visually arresting. This colorful experience draws you in and doesn't let go until after the credits roll.



| SYSTEMS BREAKDOWN | |
|---|---|
| 360 | 30 |
| PS3 | 27 |
| PC | 18 |
| Wii | 5 |
| DS | 5 |
| Xbox Live Arcade | 4 |
| PSP | 2 |
| PS2 | 2 |

| EXCLUSIVES BREAKDOWN | |
|---|---|
| PC | 5 |
| 360 | 5 |
| PS3 | 4 |
| Wii | 3 |
| DS | 3 |
| Xbox Live Arcade | 3 |
| PSP | 1 |

# Top 10 Disappointments of 2008

## 1 Xbox 360 – Still Seeing Red



**You might not know it, but each Xbox 360 comes with a free game. It's called Living on Borrowed Time. It starts the moment you buy the console and ends when you see the three red rings of death. Despite Microsoft's promises to fix the problem, even the vaunted Xbox 360 Elites are still crapping out at an unacceptable rate. This is a bad multiplayer game we've all had to play too many times.**

### 2 PS3 Loses Its Momentum

The PS3 has lost all its summer momentum. The software cavalry has yet to arrive, and in this economy, being more expensive than the 360 isn't doing the PS3 any favors. Two years into the system's life and despite winning the hi-def format war, people still can't come up with reasons why they should own the system. We know Sony is taking a long-term approach to the console, but letting your platform die on the vine seems like a poor strategy.

### 3 Nintendo's Holiday Hose-Job

How come you bought a Wii and everyone else – including your clumsy dad – is having more fun with it than you? Nintendo gave hardcore fans Super Smash Bros. Brawl early in the year, but it's a travesty that serious gamers haven't enjoyed anything else on that level this holiday season.

### 4 Stupid Avatars

Geeks like us feel self-loathing, but Xbox 360's avatars take the self-hate to a whole new level. Many New Xbox Experience features are disappointing, but the avatars serve as the dashboard's shameful face. If only you didn't have to make one. Instead, even mighty and proud gamers are reduced to looking like that kid nobody wants to clan with.

### 5 Activision's Getting Rehm Flush

Most companies would kill to have a few solid-looking games in its portfolio, but not Activision. After merging with Vivendi, Activision jettisoned Brütal Legend, Ghostbusters, and other titles and studios. Commenting on the games, Activision CEO Bobby Kotick said that they didn't "have the potential to be exploited every year…" In other news, look forward to Activision's exciting, recycled line-up next year!

### 6 PSP Software Hits Rock Bottom

The PSP has always needed more quality titles, but 2008 was the driest year in a desert of underwhelming software support. Yet the system is selling great! Sony swears 2009 is going to be better, and judging by how dismal this year was, we have no trouble believing it.

### 7 Too Bad For Too Human

Too Human was 14 years in the making and yet anybody who played it for two minutes could have told you that it was an unplayable mess. Featuring awful targeting and unbalanced character classes, the disappointing Too Human only got worse the more the game's story tried to explain itself. Creator Denis Dyack tried to shout down any and all objections to Too Human, but he's about the only defender of this title left.

### 8 Fable II Co-Op

Fable II didn't axe a ton of features like its predecessor, but we can't help but feel! mislead by Fable II's online co-op. Instead of allowing people to roam other's worlds, you're tethered to your host the entire time – without even the simple option of playing as your own character. What kind of co-op campaign is it really when you're reliant on the host for even simple gameplay functions?

### 9 MMO Momentum Stops

This was supposed to be the year when the industry delivered variety to go along with our steady diet of World of Warcraft, but it didn't turn out that way. Age of Conan's endgame content was lacking, Warhammer hasn't lived up to its promise, and Hellgate: London and Tabula Rasa flamed out so badly their servers are already shut down. We didn't think these games would be bigger than WoW, but an opportunity has clearly been missed to capture MMO players' attention and money.

### 10 Final Fantasy XIII: Where Art Thou?

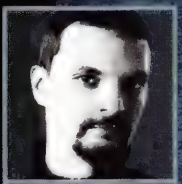
XIII is turning out to be quite the unlucky number for Square Enix. Even though Final Fantasy XIII's already spent years in development, the developer couldn't even give us a release date when it announced that it was coming to the 360 at E3. Great. Maybe Square could kill some more time by making another Final Fantasy VII trailer for the remake of the game that it says isn't even coming out. That's time well spent.

# THE EDITORS' TOP 10 PICKS



## ANDY

1. World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
2. Rock Band 2
3. Left 4 Dead
4. LittleBigPlanet
5. Professor Layton and the Curious Village
6. Fallout 3
7. Fable II
8. Dead Space
9. Gears of War 2
10. Braid



## REINER

1. Grand Theft Auto IV
2. Fallout 3
3. Left 4 Dead
4. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
5. Gears of War 2
6. Fable II
7. Dead Space
8. LittleBigPlanet
9. Call of Duty: World at War
10. Lost Odyssey



## MATT

1. LittleBigPlanet
2. Rock Band 2
3. Grand Theft Auto IV
4. Guitar Hero: World Tour
5. Professor Layton and the Curious Village
6. Midnight Club: Los Angeles
7. N+
8. Braid
9. Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood
10. Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters



## KATO

1. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
2. NHL 09
3. Fallout 3
4. Grid
5. Pure
6. Burnout Paradise
7. Sins of a Solar Empire
8. LittleBigPlanet
9. Valkyria Chronicles
10. The World Ends With You



## ADAM

1. World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
2. Left 4 Dead
3. Sins of a Solar Empire
4. LittleBigPlanet
5. Fallout 3
6. Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift
7. Civilization Revolution
8. Soulcalibur IV
9. Gears of War 2
10. Civilization IV: Colonization





## JOE

1. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
2. Braid
3. LittleBigPlanet
4. Fallout 3
5. Lost Odyssey
6. Devil May Cry 4
7. Professor Layton and the Curious Village
8. Fable II
9. Bully: Scholarship Edition
10. Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney



## MILLER

1. Rock Band 2
2. Braid
3. Fable II
4. Prince of Persia
5. Castle Crashers
6. Fallout 3
7. Gears of War 2
8. Grid
9. Grand Theft Auto IV
10. Star Wars: The Force Unleashed



## BERTZ

1. Grand Theft Auto IV
2. NHL 09
3. Left 4 Dead
4. Fallout 3
5. Braid
6. LittleBigPlanet
7. Fable II
8. Rock Band 2
9. Rainbow Six Vegas 2
10. Battlefield: Bad Company



## BRYAN

1. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
2. Rock Band 2
3. Fable II
4. Bully: Scholarship Edition
5. Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney
6. Braid
7. Professor Layton and the Curious Village
8. Condemned 2: Bloodshot
9. Pure
10. Patapon



## BEN

1. Fallout 3
2. Dead Space
3. Braid
4. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
5. Grand Theft Auto IV
6. Left 4 Dead
7. Civilization Revolution
8. Fable II
9. Super Smash Bros. Brawl
10. Rock Band 2



# MIKE BOOTH

SENIOR PROGRAMMER/DESIGNER, VALVE

**>> After a long career in gaming, Valve's Mike Booth struck gold with the superb multiplayer zombie masterpiece Left 4 Dead. We spoke with Booth about his views on the game industry, artificial intelligence, and the future of Left 4 Dead. <<**

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1995 ▶ Tune In, Drop Out**



As a graduate student, Booth skips his thesis to begin working on a shareware PC adaptation of the classic arcade game Gauntlet

**2000 ▶ Switching Gears**



After his start-up Hyperion Technologies is acquired by EA/Westwood, Booth's Gauntlet project is retooled and released as the isometric RPG Nox

**2002 ▶ On Strike**

Disillusioned with EA, Booth leaves the company and becomes obsessed with playing Valve's legendary shooter Counter-Strike. In the same year, he forms the game studio Turtle Rock

**2002 ▶ The Bot**

After a call to Valve's Scott Lynch, Booth begins working on the Counter-Strike "bot," an AI component that allowed single-player play

**2002 ▶ The Big Idea**



In testing the Counter-Strike bot, Booth hits upon the idea of small, co-op team play, which would evolve into Left 4 Dead

**2004 ▶ Striking Gold**

Turtle Rock and Valve release Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, which added new multiplayer functionality and a single-player mission pack

**2008 ▶ Into the Fold**

In January of 2008, Valve announces that it has acquired Turtle Rock and its upcoming game Left 4 Dead

**2008 ▶ Massive Acclaim**



In November, Left 4 Dead is released and wins strong sales and glowing reviews for its tense horror multiplayer action

**After you left EA to go independent with Turtle Rock, what attracted you to working with Valve?**
I have often said that I'm not sure if I would even be in the game industry anymore if not for Valve. These guys seemed to be one of the last islands of independent creativity, at least at the time, in the industry. There is a ton of talented people here and they are focused on the actual game, not the bottom line.

**When did you first have the idea that became Left 4 Dead?**
The idea for Left 4 Dead came directly from play testing the bots in Counter-Strike. We would have bots on one team and the Counter-Strike dev team on the other side. We discovered that a handful of guys on the CT side, armed to the teeth, against 30 terrorist bots that are limited to knives was a ton of fun. I took that and ran with it.

**You've been pretty critical of the mainstream publishing industry. You've said it is short sighted and stifles creativity. Do you still feel that way?**
Unfortunately, I do still feel that way. People who develop games tend to develop games because they are passionate about what they do. The powers that be mercilessly use that to generate revenue. It's really hard to escape that cycle where the developer needs money to survive and is being strung along by a publisher. If you get so lucky as to have a really interesting idea with a lot of potential, there are still innumerable hurdles to executing that idea well.

**Left 4 Dead has a pretty unique approach to multiplayer; everything is based around co-op. What are your thoughts about co-op versus competitive multiplayer?**
That was really the primary thing I wanted to explore with Left 4 Dead -- the cooperative nature of the gameplay. When you have your traditional competitive multiplayer, it's a zero-sum game. If I win, you lose. Where, with a co-op game, you and I can play together. Your success is my success. In the case of Left 4 Dead, even if we fail, we've had moments of success together during that time and we have a great story to tell.

**Talk about the AI director. Is it mostly a matter of how many zombies the game is throwing at you and how many health pickups there are, or does it go deeper than that?**
In a lot of ways, the AI director is very simple. That's by design. It isn't so much about balancing the difficulty of the game on the fly as it is ensuring that there's exciting drama. What it's doing primarily is gauging the number of wandering infected and the number of mobs that hit the survivor team. It's making sure that there are areas where it is quiet and that there are times when all hell is breaking loose. It's a sequence of peaks and valleys at a fairly regular interval. That simple dial of turning the [intensity] up and down has proven really effective.

**You've said we're still in the baby stages of AI. What future innovations or ideas in AI do you want to try to accomplish?**
There are literally infinite possibilities. [For example] you could have an AI director that can choose totally different scenarios or introduce new characters. Instead of the major way of creating excitement being to throw a big mob at them, expand the repertoire of possibilities. Also, we're just scratching the surface with dialogue. One thing that games aren't doing is procedural drama -- having a real emotional engagement with characters that's not scripted or predicted. That's pie in the sky stuff, but there's a whole universe of games that you could create if you had that technology. Plus, there's the environment itself. In Left 4 Dead, the environment is pretty static. But, if we push on procedural systems, every time you play a game like Left 4 Dead the environment could be completely different.

**You went away from the usual plodding Resident Evil-style zombies in this game in favor of some unique creatures. What were some of your horror inspirations?**
We definitely reviewed a lot of the movies, popular fiction, and games. But when it came to the actual mechanics, the special [types of] Infected came from direct gameplay issues. If these four survivors knew the map really well and stayed together, the game was kind of dull. We needed a creature that can get in there and mess up their plans. Out of that was born the smoker, because he can grab a guy and pull him out of position.

The witch is another example. She's the one you don't want to engage. It's interesting to change the rules up on the survivors.

**Valve is known for storytelling, especially Half-Life 2, but Left 4 Dead doesn't feature much in the way of narrative. Do you wish you'd had more storytelling?**
The thing I like about where your question comes from is that you're coming from Half-Life 2, saying there's not a lot of storytelling in Left 4 Dead. But Left 4 Dead is more of a descendent of Counter-Strike than Half-Life. So the fact that you're talking about narrative and story at all in a multiplayer game that's related to Counter-Strike, to me tells me that we made a step in the right direction… The main thing, though, is the visceral experience of surviving this with your friends. It wasn't necessarily a plot-driven mystery or narrative thing to start with.

**There's really no context given to the events in the game. Do you have an internal fiction about the universe you've created?**
We have some backstory and all the survivors definitely have their own stories. We use that as a template to do other things, like their dialogue. We made an intentional choice to keep the Infection itself kind of vague. We certainly don't want to go the route of "Some evil government scientist lab created this terrible virus that destroyed mankind." We're leaving it nebulous. It may just be one of those forces of nature that happen from time to time. If this kind of thing really happened, you wouldn't know what was going on. The TV doesn't work. There's no press. The police are gone. It's just you and a couple of people and you've got to survive -- so figure it out, buddy. [Laughs]

**Is there a chance you might explore more of the backstory in the future in a game context?**
Absolutely. We have people here from all sectors of the entertainment industry, including film. There are a lot of folks that are interested in continuing to explore the world of Left 4 Dead and this survival horror experience in all sorts of different media. We'll have to see where it takes us.

***People who develop games are passionate about what they do. The powers that be mercilessly use that to generate revenue.***




Photo: Richard Brown

■ Mike Booth's Left 4 Dead is one of the year's breakout successes, and has helped further the cause of co-op multiplayer

# THE MULTIPLAYER MASTERMIND

pc

## LOGITECH G13 GAMEBOARD

AVERAGE

The person who invented the keyboard never intended it be used to play games. Even modern boards that cater to the gaming market can still leave you with hand cramps after a few hours, so if you're interested in a more gaming-centric device, Logitech's G13 provides an interesting solution. The G13 features 25 programmable keys, enough onboard memory to hold three profiles, and a built-in LCD screen that displays game stats and system info. The unit's soft ergonomic design feels great, but the price is a little hefty, especially if you're just playing Tetris all day. Gamers who spend a lot of time on their PCs might find this a worthwhile investment.

**$79.99 • www.logitech.com**





peripheral

## PLAYSTATION 3 WIRELESS KEYPAD

AVERAGE

It's about time the PS3 had an answer to the 360's Chatpad. We just wish Sony had taken more cues from Microsoft while developing its Wireless Keypad. While this keypad gets the job done, the unit's placement – above the controller – makes typing awkward, it needs to be charged separately, and doesn't have backlighting. The touchpad functionality used to navigate menus works well, but we found it easier to use the controller's analog sticks most of the time. The device is light and largely unobtrusive while gaming, and the shortcut buttons that take you directly to your message box and friends list are a nice touch. Too bad the price is so steep; a USB keyboard is much cheaper.

**$49.99 • www.us.playstation.com**




software

## PLAYON

AVERAGE

Microsoft's recent Xbox 360 dashboard update already lets you watch Netflix movies on your TV, and you can already stream Hulu to your PS3, but what if that's not enough entertainment for your lazy weekends? MediaMall's PlayOn is a simple program that bridges any PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, or HP MediaSmart TV with your computer so it can access content from sites like Netflix, Hulu, CBS, YouTube, and ESPN. The software is simple to install and easy to use. The streaming quality is great for SDTVs, and okay for HD (our streams hovered around 480p). It's hard to recommend paying for something that's free on your PC and less elegantly available on the PS3, but if the convenience is worth it to you, this is a nifty software package. At the very least, give the free two-week trial a go.

**$30.00 • www.themediamall.com/playon**



peripheral

## EVERLAST WII BOXING GLOVES

BAD

Do you really need us to tell you that this product isn't worth it? These 3.8-oz Everlast training gloves have sleeves to hold your Wii remote while playing Wii Boxing, or presumably any other game that requires you to flail in front of the screen. However, these synthetic leather gloves don't really enhance your boxing experience. If anything, they make navigating game menus more annoying. Duct tape a controller to some actual boxing gloves if you're looking for this kind of experience.

**$29.99 • www.everlast.com**

awesome

## VALKYRIE PROFILE LENNETH STATUE

Lenneth, the soul-hunting warrior Square Enix ripped out of Norse mythology for its Valkyrie Profile series, is so awesome she deserves her own statue. It may not be timely, but this Japanese export is definitely worth the wait. This finely detailed piece from Sculpture Arts houses a tiny stained-glass window that lights up, and the whole unit weighs a solid 20 pounds. This mold is expected to have a low production run, so RPG fans should jump on this one quickly.

$419.99 • www.square-enix-shop.com





toys

## MASTER REPLICAS COVENANT ENERGY SWORD

Arguably the coolest energy weapon since the lightsaber, Halo's fan-favorite deathmatch toy finally has a decent real-life facsimile. The folks at Master Replicas have put together this blade, which features an authentically detailed die cast hilt, and a blade that not only pulses as it lights up, but produces five sounds effects from the game. Now we just need to convince someone to make a Gravity Hammer and our backyard war with the kids across the street is on.

$199.99 • www.masterreplicas.com

toys

## TRANSFORMERS MIGHTY MUGS

These alien robot agents of destruction show their softer side in the newest line of Hasbro's hit Mighty Mugs collectible figures. We were lucky enough to score this first glimpse of the new Starscream toy. The full set also includes Optimus Prime, Megatron, Bumblebee, and Soundwave. Be careful – these sleek, rounded toys are like a gateway drug into the dangerous world of figurine collectibles.

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The latest novel in the Dragonlance series details a quest to save the world by recovering five bones from an ancient dragon.

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### 2. *Hulk Vs.*

Hulk takes on Thor and Wolverine in this animated two-feature Blu-ray spectacular.

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Season six of one of Adult Swim's biggest shows features four never-before-seen episodes starring Meatwad, Master Shake, and Frylock.

$29.98 • www.adultswim.com

### 4. *The Tudors* Second Season

This Golden Globe-winning series from Showtime re-envisions the scandalous life of King Henry the VIII.

$40.99 • www.showtime.com

### 5. *Suicide Collectors* by David Oppegaard

After 90 percent of the population commits suicide, a survivor must travel across North America to uncover the mystery behind the phenomenon in this dark and compelling read.

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# GIVE ME CONTROL: WHY ARE CONSOLE INTERFACES SO RIGID?

ADAM BIESSENER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER



The source of this problem is that developers mistakenly keep trying to reinvent the wheel.

As a gamer who spends the majority of his playtime on a PC, I am often baffled when firing up a console game. Not because of the controller – Halo taught us all that genres once thought exclusively the domain of mice and keyboards can successfully make the leap to thumbsticks. It's the lack of control over one's own input that continually frustrates me. I cannot understand why developers so often omit the ability to customize controls.

From a player's perspective, there's no downside to assigning buttons the way you like. Control schemes rarely lack some niggle bringing it down, like two functions being backwards from your favorite game. The ability to bind functions however you prefer neatly sidesteps most of those issues at very little cost to the developer (though it still isn't always quite enough to make a truly heinous interface like SOCOM's feel right). It's hard to imagine problems arising from allowing players to reverse the placement of "reload" and "activate" on their gamepad.

As an extreme example, consider some of the more radical World of Warcraft custom user interfaces: threat meters overlap damage meters, semitransparent health bars overlay half the main view, status displays line the top and bottom of the screen, and several dozen clickable buttons with different abilities and macros are bound all over the keyboard. Any self-respecting designer would resign in protest against their game shipping with the messy and unintuitive interfaces some players create. But talk to any longtime player with a highly customized UI, and they can't imagine playing any other way. WoW's success speaks for itself – as does the loyalty and happiness of its players.

Some designers want players to get used to the interface they spent all that effort and all those focus group sessions refining, like Gears of War (which, to be fair, has a perfectly acceptable control scheme). Fine, make us use your scheme long enough to potentially adapt to them in the tutorial and intro levels. But if a player still has issues with your controls after an hour or two, something is wrong. Why insist that clicking the left stick be a crouch toggle? What if I'm a high-strung dude who often clicks it during heated firefights, screwing my mobility by accident? I don't care if your studio and hardcore fanbase both like your nonstandard controls. I don't, and there's no reason to deny me an alternative.

To extend the Gears of War example, imagine the game with unlocked controls. Most people would probably play with the default settings and never know the difference; Gears' well-designed scheme suits the gameplay well. The small percentage of players who dislike some aspect of the interface – maybe they just can't get the hang of reload on a shoulder button, or really wish melee was on R3 because they play a ton of Call of Duty – would greatly appreciate the opportunity to change it. The cost to the developer would be negligible. Nobody loses.

In some cases, a happy medium is reached. Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway, for example, gives players the option to use the Halo, Call of Duty, or Rainbow Six Vegas schemes as well as its own defaults. I personally prefer an option to rebind functions freely on top of that, but if nothing else it's a step in the right direction.

The source of this problem is that developers mistakenly keep trying to reinvent the wheel. This has plagued the real-time strategy genre on PCs for years, and popular console archetypes suffer from it as well. If an interface works well and players are happy with it, why rebuild it from the ground up? In RTS games, players expect troops given an attack-move order to behave a certain way. In a console FPS, we expect the reload and activate to be on the face buttons while more common functions reside on the shoulders. There is almost never justification to go against every ingrained reaction your players have, and less excuse to enforce your singular vision to the exclusion of any alternative.

While most titles would benefit from placing more options in players' hands, it's not a universal rule. Games like Katamari Damacy, for instance, have control schemes deeply tied into their unique experiences. I have no problem with that; Katamari wouldn't be the same with standard controls. These exceptions are few and far between, though. I firmly believe that the overwhelming majority of titles released for consoles would benefit from implementing fully customizable controls. ■■■

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If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.

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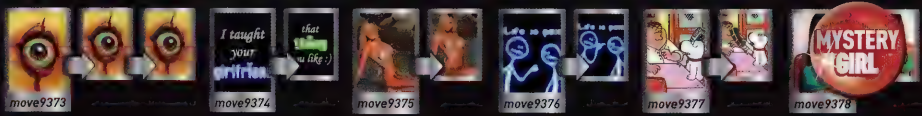
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For more information on these games and others go to www.gameinformer.com



Shellshock 2: Blood Trails – 02/03

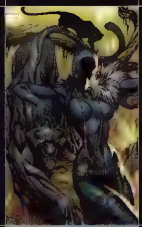
03

**NEW RELEASES**

- *Afro Samurai: Resurrection* – Blu-ray
- Burnout Paradise: Ultimate Box – PC
- Dreamer Pop Star – DS
- Grey's Anatomy – Wii, DS
- Jojo's Fashion Show – DS
- Kidz Sports: American Football – Wii
- Monster Band – DS
- Pia Yia World – Wii
- Shellshock 2: Blood Trails – PS3, 360, PC
- Tenchu: Shadow Assassin – Wii
- War Leaders: Clash of Nations – PC

04

Either T'Challa has had extensive surgery lately, or someone new is about to don the Black Panther mask for the first time. Our bets are on a certain well-known weather witch who used to hang out with the X-Men. We've also heard that it may be the mysterious Echo. Nah. We think it's T'Challa with boobs. Read Black Panther #1 to find out!





06

*Coraline* might look like a children's movie, but you can be sure that it will be packed with the worst kind of nerds: comic fans who revere Neil Gaiman as a god, think stop-motion animation is better than CG, and can recite the lyrics to every They Might Be Giants song. You'll also see a few people in the crowd who are there just to listen to Dakota "Too Old to Be A Child Actor" Fanning. We'll be there to mock all these people.



Bionic Commando – 02/10

10

**NEW RELEASES**

- Bionic Commando – PS3, 360, PC
- Deadly Creatures – Wii
- F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin – PS3, 360, PC
- Gauntlet – DS
- The Godfather 2 – PS3, 360, PC
- Legacy of Ys: Books I & II – DS
- Little Magician's Magic Adventure – DS
- Mysteryville 2 – PC
- NASCAR Kart King – Wii
- Officers – PC
- Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad – 360
- Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers – Wii
- Sonic's Ultimate Genesis Collection – PS3, 360
- Warfare – PC
- X-Blades – PS3, 360, PC
- Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's Stardust Accelerator – DS



NASCAR Kart King – 02/10

13

If you are a fan of Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*, tune into FOX tonight for the premiere of his next big thing, *Dollhouse*. If you are a fan of hockey mask-wearing marauders who tear horny teenagers to shreds, head to your local theater to see the return of Jason Vorhees in the revamped *Friday the 13th*. If you are a fan of both of these things, you have a tough decision to make.



Dollhouse



Street Fighter IV – 02/17

17

**NEW RELEASES**

- Drakensang: The Dark Eye – PC
- *Dead Like Me: Life After Death* – DVD
- Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride – DS
- Fashion Designer 2 – DS
- The House of the Dead: Overkill – Wii
- Little King's Story – Wii
- My Fashion Studio: Paris Collection – DS
- Sacred 2: Fallen Angel – 360
- Street Fighter IV – PS3, 360, PC
- Wheelman – PS3, 360, PC

18

Grant Morrison's recent run on Batman is considered by many comic enthusiasts to be one of the worst stints on a high-profile comic to date. DC Comics is hoping in Neil Gaiman to clean up this mess. His two-part story *Whatever happened to the Caped Crusader?* starts with Batman issue 686. We're confident Gaiman can get this comic back on track, but we're still hoping DC issues a statement saying that Morrison's run is not part of the Batman continuity.





20

The Sims 3 releases today! Thanks to Gears of War, Friday video game releases are becoming more common. We are all in favor of the weekend release, as we no longer have to sit through work before we can put a good 20-30 hours into the hot new games.

The Sims 3



Damnation – 02/24

24

**NEW RELEASES**

- Blue Dragon Plus – DS
- Codename Panzers – PC
- *Futurama: Into the Wild Green Yonder* – Blu-ray, DVD
- Damnation – PS3, 360, PC
- Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War II – PC



26

Worried about what you are going to be wearing in 20 years? Never fear. We'll all be rocking self-adjusting sneakers like *Back to the Future II* or stupid plastic armor like Reimi and Edge from Star Ocean: The Last Hope. These articulated statues stand in at 8-inches and retail for roughly 30 bones.



27

If you can pull yourself away from Resistance 2's multiplayer, another promising frag-fest awaits in the Friday release – Killzone 2!




Jump in.

XBOX 360


SINGU




UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** 2009

# A TIME TO KILL

The possibilities of a device that can move objects through time as easily as you wave your hand through the air are endless. You could revert an empty can of soup to full – now every garbage can is a treasure trove. The broken elevator in your office lobby could be sent back to its factory-new state, negating any inconvenience or cost of repairs. You could uncover any message ever written on any wall, chalkboard, or computer screen. A lock barring your way could be quickly crumbled into a pile of rust. You could make any broken crate a hiding spot, or turn an impassable hedge into saplings.

You could grind your enemies to dust.

**"You know what?" said Raven Software head Brian Raffel to his brother and employee Steve. "I'm not going to tell Activision about this. You guys go and do this prototype, but I can't guarantee I'm not going to have to cut you off any minute."** As a wholly owned subsidiary of mega-publisher Activision, Raven must pay heed to the realities of the business side of game development despite its cachet with gamers for years of excellent titles like Heretic, Jedi Outcast, and X-Men: Legends. This off-the-grid development process was unusual, to say the least. "We were kind of under the radar," Steve Raffel remembers. "We had a barebones mission to get it done in three months, and that focused us quite a bit."

Ultimately, this early prototype made its way to the suits in Los Angeles and was run through the focus group gauntlet that most projects are subjected to. The powers that be were impressed – it was the highest-tested product they'd ever had. When the business side of the publisher gave its blessing to the early prototype that would become Singularity, the Raffels knew they had something special on their hands. "It was very hard to get any kind of original IP done at Activision," recalls Brian Raffel. "It's kind of the crown jewel of any studio within Activision to get original IP."



Raven is not shy on over-the-top gruesome deaths



There are two distinct looks present in the game







Singularity's gameplay is built around the concept of a time manipulation device. Putting this kind of power in players' hands fundamentally alters the way they look at the world, and immediately separates Singularity from the legions of first-person shooters released annually. Everyday objects take on new meaning, and few encounters are mundane duck-and-shoot affairs. For this new triple-A franchise from Raven and Activision, though, the gameplay hook is only the beginning. "We've got a cadre of people crafting this story," says project lead Jonathon Zuk. "On previous projects we've worked on, it's like, 'Oh, we need this story, let's sit down and write one.' That's not really our forte – we can spin a story, but making it into a great story is the key."

Steve Raffel's love of 1950s sci-fi and the paranoid Cold War atmosphere that spawned it is the inspiration for Singularity's unique setting. In that time of potential nuclear armageddon and thick international tension, both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. were deeply involved in researching anything they thought could tip the scales of the global power struggle. Dead ends and blind alleys were explored by both sides, and history has uncovered many top-secret projects of the time. But what if there was something so horrific that even Stalin's Russia balked, burying it so deeply that it remained classified until now? What happens when interested parties in the newly powerful capitalist Russia and the U.S. military catch a whiff of it at the same time, and decide to use it for their own advantage?

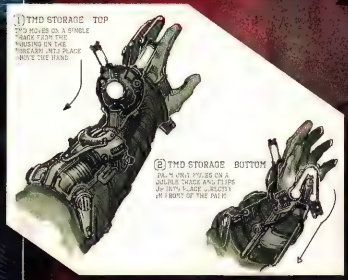
Singularity's fiction is predicated upon the existence of E99, an element that in real life is called Einsteinium and is of little practical interest. In the game world, though, this element has an unusual energy locked within. By manipulating E99, Soviet scientists in 1950 created machines that generated massive amounts of power and had amazing abilities, all without any apparent cost. An ill-advised experiment, however, caused a massive explosion that destroyed much of the island where the experiments took place, setting the rest adrift in time.

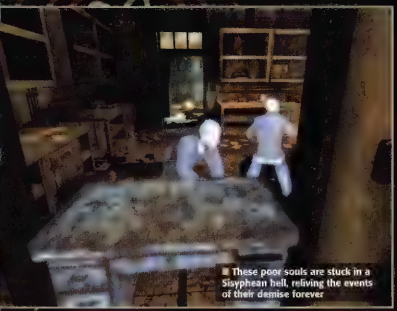
Raven describes the effect of the explosion on the island like an adult giving a kid on a swing a push. Reality swings back and forth between 1950 and the present day, and like a child dragging his feet through the dirt as he swings past, objects are sometimes dragged out of their proper time and deposited elsewhere. Eerie, malevolent creatures now roam the island, seemingly interested only in carnage. Ghostly apparitions pop into our reality, doomed forever to relive the events of that horrible day in 1950. Massive time waves crash over the island, dragging everything on it back and forth in time. As the game begins, one man is unwillingly deposited into this chaotic milieu.

Players take on the role of U.S. Air Force reconnaissance pilot Nate Renko. This average Joe soldier is given routine orders to recon a set of map coordinates – which happens to be the location of an unnamed island that exists on no map. Shot down by unknown assailants, alone in hostile territory, hunted by monsters and more conventional enemy forces, Renko finds the one thing that will allow him to survive in this strange land: the time manipulation device, or TMD.



The use of Unreal Engine 3 enables impressive in-game cinematics





These poor souls are stuck in a Sisyphean hell, reliving the events of their demise forever

Raven is keeping further story elements under wraps for the time being, but the developer is not so guarded when it comes to gameplay scenarios. The TMD's capabilities underlie nearly every inch of Singularity's design. Its four powers (see sidebar) are integral to combat, exploration, and plot development – players will use the device constantly. A selection of puzzles, encounters, and other situations are already running in-game, and illustrate many of these concepts well.

With the TMD strapped to his left hand and a submachine gun in his right, our hero easily dispatches the hostile modern-day Russians he encounters. A clever application of the Age power can crumble the support under a platform, tumbling enemies to their deaths. Unloading a clip from his SMG into a crate will blow it away before tearing through the foes hiding behind it. Renko can even go so far as to grab an old, rusted-out barrel with the Stasis power, Revert it to an older, full version of itself, and fling it with Impulse to immolate anyone nearby.

The TMD may thumb its nose at physics, but there are some lines Raven chooses not to cross. Reverting human enemies does not turn them into babies as you'd expect. Instead, they become "placental reverts" that live a horrible, tortured existence for a few minutes before perishing – which is still less distasteful than harming children.

Despite the TMD's unlimited energy, players aren't discouraged from leaning on their guns – Raven is approaching ammunition from a perspective much closer to Half-Life than Resident Evil. The team wants players to have options and adopt a playstyle they enjoy, not feel railroaded into using a predetermined "correct" tool for each situation. One break from genre traditions is the lack of grenades. Zuk explains, "With the gravity feature there is so much stuff you can pick up and throw that we felt that grenades were redundant."

The most intriguing object to throw around with the TMD is called a Deadlock. These function more or less as stasis grenades: The small spheroids project fields a few meters in diameter that freeze anything that comes into contact with them. Renko is immune to this effect, and grabbing one with the TMD's Stasis power temporarily deactivates it, so Deadlock fields can be used as portable refuges. The stasis zone stops everything: bullets, enemies, ten-ton containers, you name it. Since Singularity's environments are full of physics-enabled objects, Deadlocks can be put to any number of creative uses. We even saw some environments where Russian forces had apparently used Deadlocks to hold decaying buildings together, giving Renko the opportunity to pull the Deadlocks away and bury his enemies under collapsing rubble.

Amid the game's many sci-fi elements, Singularity's gunplay is a welcome touchstone. Familiar firearms – including pistols, submachine guns,

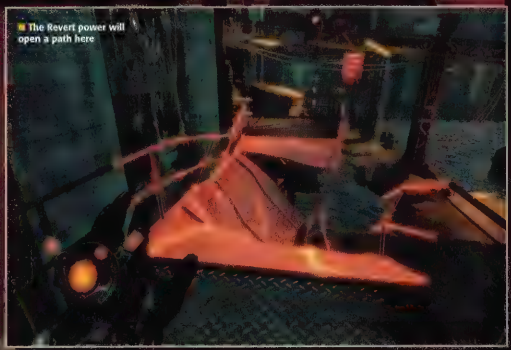


This is a "placental revert." Being turned to bones and dust might be preferable

## FEEL THE POWER

**The TMD has four powers, each of which will be upgraded at some point during the game:**

- **Age –** Moves an object forward along its own timeline, causing supports to crumble and rust or enemies to become piles of bones. Upgraded, the progression happens nearly instantly.
- **Revert –** The same as Age, but backwards. Crates become whole and full, busted staircases are repaired, etc. Similarly, the upgrade makes the power take almost instantaneous effect.
- **Stasis –** Pulls an object out of time, yanking it toward you and freezing its personal timeline. Along with Impulse, this works nearly identically to the Half-Life 2 gravity gun. Upgraded Stasis can affect larger objects.
- **Impulse –** Violently pushes an object away from you, stunning any enemy it's used on. After it is upgraded, Stasis can shove heavier objects and outright kill weaker enemies.



The Revert power will open a path here

and shotguns — make up a significant part of Renko's toolbox. There's not much to relate about the presence of these traditional weapons in the game — they act just the way any gamer with experience with first-person shooters is used to. Raven has been creating solid FPS titles for over a decade, and there is no reason to expect the firefights here to be lacking.

With the focus on creating a compelling setting and present a worthwhile story, creatively neutralizing hostiles is far from the only thing players will do. TMD-assisted exploration is an important part of the game, and will reward dedicated players with everything from health and ammo to backstory tidbits. "The explorers that are finding the sailors' notes, or the recordings, or the film reels, are going to get what happened on the island, what occurred in the past, and a lot of depth," Zuk notes. This informed Raven's decision to use a traditional health pack system and allow players to carry as many weapons as they can find. Zuk tells us, "People like exploring, opening those crates up, looking for health, and seeing what they can find. When we tried regenerating health, we found that it detracted from our game."

The game isn't all about crawling through run-down industrial areas blowing up mysterious Russians, though. We witnessed several dramatic set pieces that throw curveballs at players. As he



■ Phase ticks hives are nasty



■ The interface isn't visible in these shots, but it will include an easy-to-read indicator of what can and cannot be manipulated with the TMD



Here you can see the effects of a time wave

attempts to restore function to a machine that can boost the TMD's power enough to raise a sunken freighter out of a harbor. Renko is overtaken by a huge ripple passing over the landscape. As it passes through him, he finds himself in the 1950 version of the island.

Everything here is weirdly alien. The color palette is desaturated and shifted, lending the tableau an eldritch aspect like an autumn storm at dusk. The buildings and industrial apparatus around Renko are intact, and pristine posters of Josef Stalin gaze down at him with stern warnings in Cyrillic lettering. The docks are crawling with Red Army soldiers who have no idea what they're up against. Firearms from 1950 are no match for Renko's arsenal, though the sheer numbers of commies he runs up against are dangerous. This area's upright buildings and clear walkways are a good example of the game's limited non-linearity. "We're trying to make this a thinking man's shooter, so in as many cases as we can we want to give you multiple solutions," Zuk says. Renko can sprint from building to building, limiting his exposure to enemy fire, or he can run-and-gun across the docks, taking advantage of the many TMD-enabled objects there to efficiently dispatch the enemies.

The swingset metaphor for the progress of time on the island is apt. Renko is always eventually swept back to his own time. The designers at Raven take clever advantage of this – once you've seen something in its original, functional state, it's a natural guide to how to solve the puzzle facing you back in modern times. In this case, the path open to Renko in the 1950 waterfront showed him the power assembly for the machine he's attempting to use to raise the freighter. In the present, it's a relatively simple matter to replace the broken power cell and restore power.

Using the capabilities of Unreal Engine 3, Raven's in-house cinematics department is confident that Singularity will have over two dozen in-game movies like the impressive scene depicting Renko's Yoda moment on the waterfront. Furthermore, manipulating large sections of the environment is part and parcel of the game's focus on time – which lends itself to epic situations like the freighter slowly slipping back in time due to the unstable nature of the boosted TMD effect. As Renko makes his way through the ship, it decays and lists in the water, throwing unexpected obstacles in his path. Bulkheads buckle, dumping crates to the deck. The hull rusts through, shooting powerful jets of water across the holds. And through it all, enemies human and otherwise are out for Renko's blood.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 57 >>







The presence of E99 on objects and people is what allows the TMI to act upon them



The modern-day Russian forces are no bumbling Red Army conscripts

## BENDING TIME FOR FUN AND PROFIT

**The TMD is a versatile tool. Here are a few of the more creative things you can accomplish with it:**

- Age an old, rusted, and flat oil barrel, then pull it through a small hole with Stasis and revert it back to its full, pristine state to blow a hole in a wall
- Stand on a tree stump, then revert it to its uncut state to raise you up to an area you couldn't reach otherwise
- Age the cargo crates your enemies are hiding behind to an old, broken-down state, thus denying them cover
- Revert an empty can of soup to full, then eat it to regain health. Make sure you revert it first, though – otherwise you'll cut yourself on the sharp lid for a good chunk of damage
- Revert your own cover after it's been degraded by enemy fire
- Run a chalkboard back in time to read everything that has been written on it in the past
- Throw back enemy grenades with the Stasis power. While you're "holding" an object it is frozen in time, so the grenade won't explode until you want it to

Creatures will attack anyone who wanders too close



A plethora of odd things are being dragged onto the island by E99 reactions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54





Phase ticks can be turned into harmless babies by the Revert power





Zeks phase in and out of our reality to avoid damage and surprise their victims

Following the analogy of the swingset, pulling something the size of this huge freighter through time will drag some unwanted guests along. Phasing monstrosities called Zeks (the Russian word for "prisoners") are the possessed bodies of hapless victims. These nasty things quickly pop in and out of our reality, appearing suddenly to swipe at their targets with brutal claws before phasing out to prevent any reprisal. Inflicting fatal damage to a Zek results in the worm-like monster that had burrowed into the human body shrieking as it is forced out of the now-dead flesh. The beast quickly perishes without a host, thankfully.

Phase ticks appear from disturbing organic hives that adhere to walls. These small insectoid creatures are reminiscent of Halo's Flood infection form – these skittering little suicide bombers are far deadlier than their size implies. Renko's first encounter with them is depicted in a cinematic where he watches from the shadows as two Russians come upon a hive. They've clearly never seen one before either, and cautiously approach the anomaly. The obvious transpires: one of the critters rams a Russian, popping the sac of E99 in its thorax. The unfortunate screams as the concentrated E99 reduces him to a placental revert, a fleshy aberration that makes disturbing squelching noises as it slithers along the ground. His clearly unnerved comrade shoots what's left of him out of mercy.

These two creatures are all that Raven was ready to show, but we were assured that they were only the beginning. Given the nature of the gameplay, it wouldn't surprise us to see enemies that required use of the TMD in creative ways to defeat.

As these creatures out of time are seemingly hostile towards everything but each other, players can use them to their advantage by maneuvering human enemies toward them. However, we also saw one instance in which the Russians were clearly flanking Renko and attempting to flush him toward a nest of phase ticks, so the AI is aware of this tactic as well.

Puzzles built around bouncing between time periods and creative use of the TMD will challenge players' wits as well as their aim. In one scenario, Renko's way is blocked by massive, immobile steel tubes that were rusted in place in the modern day. An E99-powered machine sits nearby, maintaining a stationary portal to 1950, when the tubes are neatly stacked. Going through the portal, Renko can snap the cables holding the tubes in place, opening a path to his goal. This affects the present time where Renko's objective is as well – but only for a short time. As when he raised the freighter from the seafloor, these larger disturbances in the timeline are short-lived. After 30 seconds or so, the timeline snaps back to its natural state, with the tubes again forming an impassable barrier. All this adds up to a timed puzzle event that players must complete to advance the story, a welcome change of pace from the usual action.

What we've seen of Singularity so far – creative design, fresh subject matter, and solid mechanics – is enough to plant the title firmly on our radar for 2009. The mystery behind why Renko was sent to the island in the first place will have to wait, as will the identity and motivations of the Russian forces. In the meantime, the news that such a talented studio received its first green light on new IP since 2000's Soldier of Fortune – and that the game looks so good already – is excellent enough.


FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4
FIGHTING



# FOR THE TITLE

"WHEN IT HIT THE SHELVES, I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE LIKE, 'NEXT-GEN IS HERE.'" GAMEPLAY PRODUCER BRIAN HAYES IS RIGHT. FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 OPENED PEOPLE'S EYES TO WHAT THE NEW CONSOLES WERE VISUALLY CAPABLE OF, FEATURING BOXERS WITH SWEAT-GLISTENING MUSCULATURE AND THE SLOW-MOTION, HEAD-JERKING BLOOD SPRAY OF A KNOCKOUT BLOW. HOWEVER, THE LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED SINCE THIS FIGHTER WAS LAST IN THE RING. A NEW DEVELOPER IS AT THE HELM, AND FLASHY GRAPHICS WILL ONLY GET YOU SO FAR THESE DAYS. BUT LIKE ANY GOOD BOXER, EA HAS KEPT ITS FEET MOVING, TRAINING HARD TO STAY AT THE TOP OF ITS GAME.

>>

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA SPORTS CANADA
> **RELEASE** SUMMER

Boxing has its personalities, and video game boxing definitely had one in former EA Chicago and Fight Night head Kudo Tsunoda. He became the face of the franchise, making a name for himself as an energetic presenter at E3 press conferences. It did not last. Tsunoda guided the franchise as it morphed from Knockout Kings into Fight Night and introduced its all-analog punch system, but EA closed EA Chicago for financial reasons after fighting game Def Jam: Icon did poorly. Before the studio closed its doors, the Fight Night franchise moved up north to EA Canada, a studio that had previously handled ports of the series.

Hayes, who helped develop the original Fight Night, worked at Chicago when it happened. "The transition occurred well in advance of the closure of the Chicago studio. I asked [Tsunoda] about it. I said, 'So they took it away?' and he said, 'No. It's sports, and I wanted it to go with [EA's other] sports.' The way things turned out wasn't the greatest, but that was their plan."

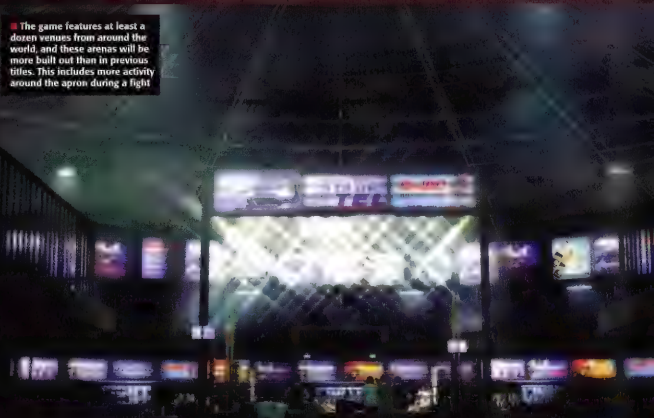
Under such upheaval and the expectation to better a franchise already in its prime, Hayes and the rest of the team started working on…the fundamentals. The fundamentals? Surely this was a strength of Fight Night Round 3 – a game whose only serious flaw was the lack of a decent career mode. Well, they don't call boxing a science for nothing; the physics of every punch are so important to victory and defeat.

"The essence of boxing is hit and don't get hit," says Hayes. Sounds simple, but replicating it is not that easy. Building on the success of FNR 3 is dependant upon fleshing out the complexities of the sport. FNR 4's physics-based animation system changes how punches are given and received. The strength of a boxer's punch is no longer determined by how far back you pull the analog stick, but how cleanly you make contact with your opponent. In previous games, a hit was a hit. In FNR 4, if you're in close to your opponent and don't get the full arm extension, the power behind your punch is weakened. The game's improved collision fields offer more realism in the form of glancing blows or miss-hits. Accordingly, boxers now have more hit zones in their faces, and different punches will have different effects depending on where they land.

Blocking in FNR 4 is just as nuanced, and has been given its own meter. This meter decays over time, but blocking is not an either/or defensive state. Your overall risk increases as the meter decreases. Punches can break through your guard and your arms can be knocked away much easier as your opponent works your defense. Similarly, taking cuts on your face is not about the state of your health meter; the strength of the punch and how directly it lands on your face are much more important factors.

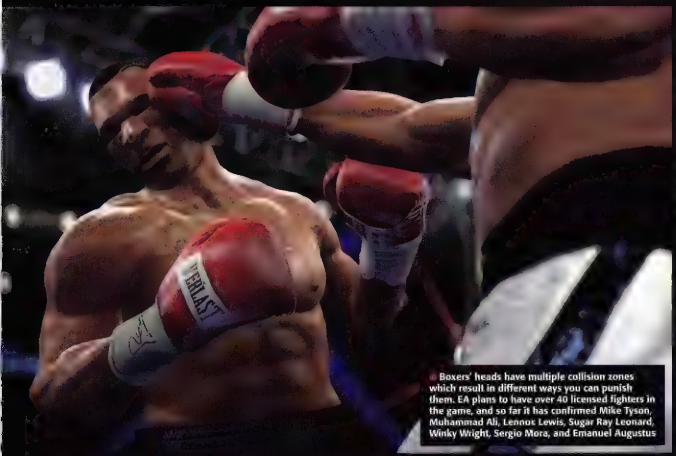
Hearing Brian Hayes reminisce about Fight Night Round 3's parry system, which allowed you to block a punch in mid-air and consequently stun your opponent, you realize how FNR 4's new physics system is better suited to providing more realistic outcomes during the moment-to-moment flow of two boxers constantly trading punches. "[FNR 3's parry system] made for an interesting gameplay mechanic. But it's something where when you did it you loved it; when it happened to you, you hated it. And it was also something that you really don't see in boxing. When Mike Tyson is throwing a punch at your head, do not try and slap it out of the air."

Without such an overt defensive mechanism, your use of boxing strategy and your boxer's natural gifts will help you survive in the ring. Fight Night Round 4 introduces more height and body variations among its roster of over 40 licensed boxers. Thus, long-armed fighters perform better if they stick and move, jabbing from a distance, while shorter boxers like Mike Tyson want to pummel you from close range, negating the advantage of an opponent's longer arms. Reconciling these two different styles puts pressure on the game's physics to get the outcomes right.

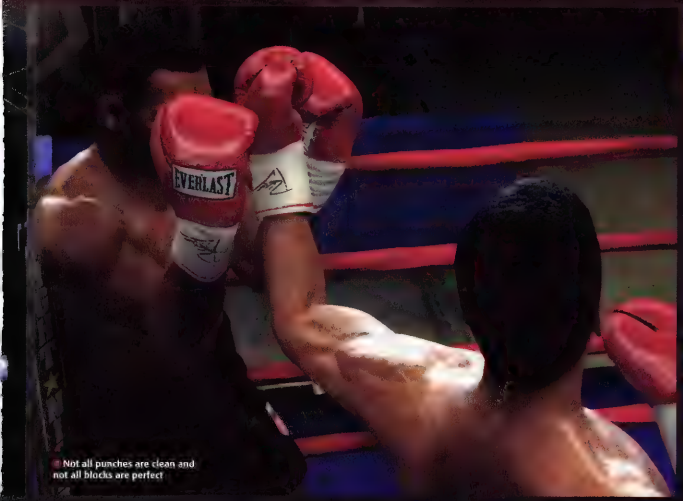


The game features at least a dozen venues from around the world, and these arenas will be more built out than in previous titles. This includes more activity around the apron during a fight

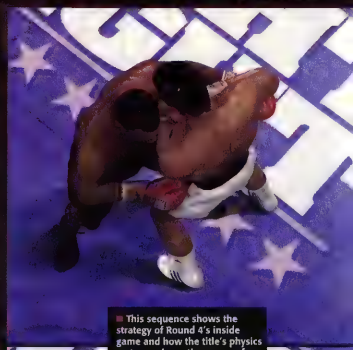
> "FNR 4'S NEW PHYSICS SYSTEM IS BETTER SUITED TO PROVIDING MORE REALISTIC OUTCOMES DURING THE MOMENT-TO-MOMENT FLOW OF TWO BOXERS CONSTANTLY TRADING PUNCHES"



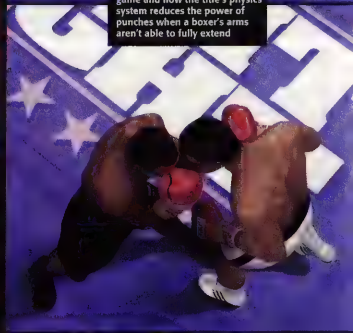

Boxers' heads have multiple collision zones which result in different ways you can punish them. EA plans to have over 40 licensed fighters in the game, and so far it has confirmed Mike Tyson, Muhammad Ali, Lennox Lewis, Sugar Ray Leonard, Winky Wright, Sergio Mora, and Emanuel Augustus




Not all punches are clean and not all blocks are perfect



This sequence shows the strategy of Round 4's inside game and how the title's physics system reduces the power of punches when a boxer's arms aren't able to fully extend





Fight Night Round 4's sports an all-new corner game

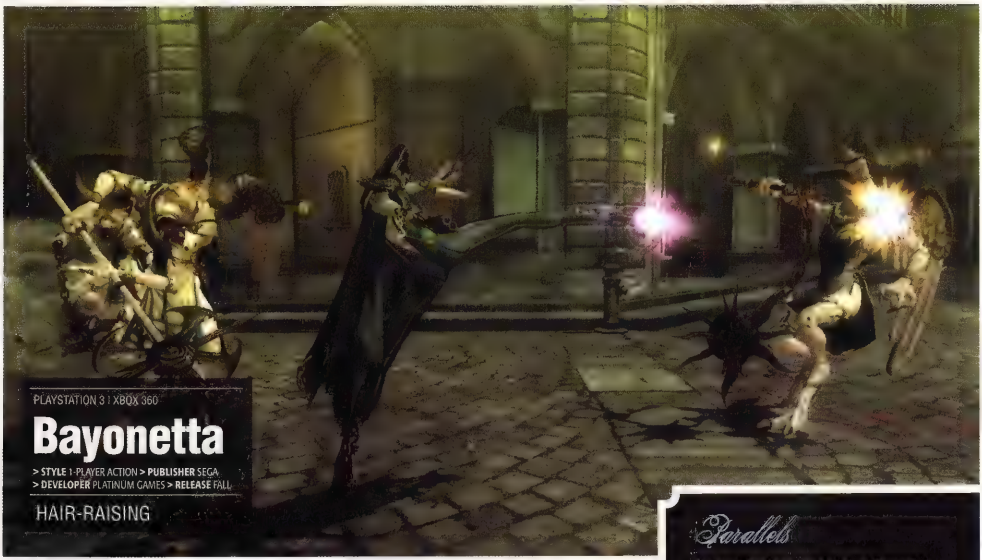


In general, FNR 4's fighters move and deliver punches faster than in previous titles. This includes more fluid combos and the ability to both duck and move at the same time, eliminating some of the rigid movements of the past.

How you like to play and how you train (via new training games) should influence how you set up your created boxer for the game's Legacy career mode. Fight Night Round 3 lacked a big career payoff, but this year's game is focused on defining your legacy as a boxer. You'll get to see how you stack up against the greatest fighters of all time. Do you stick around and risk losing some of your legacy's luster or retire early to cement your status as the undisputed king of the ring? Other career details are still being ironed out, but Hayes says the team is well aware of how disappointed fans were in the career modes of previous titles, and is trying to build a "legit, full-featured boxing career mode."

Round 4's new corner game seems indicative of the intuitive and effective approach being taken with some peripheral features. Instead of using the analog sticks to rub down swelling or poke cuts, you'll allocate points to boost your stamina, health, or facial damage between rounds. Health prevents knockdowns, stamina helps you perform, and stopping the bleeding or reducing swelling keeps the referee from stopping the fight.

Further details around the game, including its online component, the new knockdown minigame, and how the title will handle boxer attributes and gear are still being decided up in EA Canada's Vancouver studio as the game's summer release date approaches. Hayes waves off any concern we have about these peripheral details. A man with some experience in the ring, he's focused on the new gameplay of Fight Night Round 4 and bringing it back to what the sport is really about – what it means to take a punch on the back of your ear and have your right arm and leg go numb, how 120 seconds can seem like an eternity when you can only see out of one eye, and how to emerge from the ring victorious.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Bayonetta

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** PLATINUM GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

## HAIR-RAISING

Bayonetta seems like a game developed in some strange alternate reality where up is down. For example, the female protagonist is a witch, but she's a good witch. She fights angels, but they're evil angels. And she uses guns, but they're attached to her feet. In another outlandish turn, these are actually some of the more subdued aspects of this supernatural action title.

Created by ex-Capcom developer Hideki Kamiya, famous for titles like Okami and Devil May Cry, Bayonetta is a witch who uses her hair to perform magical attacks. In the midst of her various gun and sword combos, Bayonetta can supplement her attacks with hair magic by summoning forth a giant fist, a giant stiletto, or a dragon monster made out of her own mop. She may look like she's wearing a skintight leather outfit, but Bayonetta is actually clad in her own hair, so whenever she uses her hair for attacks she's left looking a little more scandalous.

Bayonetta also builds up a combat meter while dispatching baddies. Once it's full, she can summon elaborate death traps for her enemies. In one instance during our game demo, Bayonetta conjured a guillotine, kicked an angel under the device, and flipped the lever to drop the giant decapitating blade. Bayonetta can also summon monsters, such as a dragon, to help her in battle. These summons are context sensitive, so even though you might be putting in the same button sequences, the monster (and how it takes down your target) changes depending on the situation.

Considering how deadly Bayonetta is with something so tame as hair, wait until she's equipped with actual weapons. Bayonetta doesn't just dual wield, she quadruple wields; both of her feet can be equipped with either guns or swords. Performing various handstands and whipping her legs around in all directions, Bayonetta's movements are as frantic as you would expect from the creator of Devil May Cry.

When the action gets too kinetic, Bayonetta can enter a state called witch time – a spell similar to bullet time that slows down the action around her.

Kamiya has gone on record saying that the only parts of the game he's showed so far are the boring parts, which is interesting since everything we've seen so far is more intense than many games on the market today. We can't wait to see what Kamiya considers exciting. ■■■

### Parallels

Not much has been revealed about Bayonetta's story, but we do know she spends a lot of time in a realm invisible to the average person. While she sees people going about their daily lives, they can't see Bayonetta or whomever she's fighting. However, the destructive effects of her battle are visible in the real world, so once the action kicks in, you'll get to witness chaos erupt in the real world



■ Maybe a woman covered entirely by hair can be sexy. Maybe the French aren't crazy



"...and get a haircut!"



Bayonetta will collect gold halos from fallen enemies, which act like a form of currency. There will be shops throughout the game where she will be able to buy power ups, weapons, and other stuff



Bayonetta gives new meaning to the phrase "wear your hair down." [Boool =Ed]

## Fast Facts

Four interesting details you might not have known about Bayonetta:

- Kamiya is a fan of folk music and named four of Bayonetta's weapons parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme after the Simon and Garfunkel song "Scarborough Fair"
- Bayonetta uses her own internal strength to keep her hair on her body in the form of clothing, so as she gets weakened in the game her ability to hold to that form begins to fade and she'll reveal more skin. This might be the best reward gamers will ever get for sucking
- You can attack enemies indirectly off of walls, since ricochet shots also inflict damage
- Kamiya is known for keeping one central theme in mind while developing his games. Devil May Cry's theme was coolness. For Viewtiful Joe the theme was beauty. So what's Bayonetta's theme? Sexiness, of course



Each weapon is imbued with a different monster spirit, and Bayonetta can summon forth these monsters to perform larger attacks

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# X-Men Origins: Wolverine

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** MAY 1

## CLAWING BACK

One of the best superhero developers around – the Raven team behind X-Men Legends and Marvel Ultimate Alliance – is hard at work making this title more than we typically expect out of a movie-licensed game. X-Men Origins: Wolverine follows the established 3D brawler format popularized by God of War closely, but if the developer can make wrecking dudes with Wolvie fun, who are we to complain?

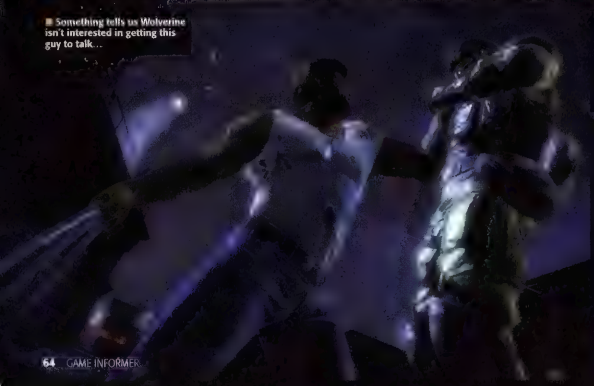
From a core design perspective, this title is breaking little new ground. Two-button combat lets Wolverine dish out brutal combos. Dodges and blocks instantly break you out of any animation in progress, and special rage powers like a whirlwind attack and a "drill" maneuver allow you to dispatch the hundreds of foes that impede your progress. Killing baddies nets you experience which can be used for upgrades like faster regeneration or increased damage. We've done this all before, but after seeing the game in action we came away impressed by how well the look and feel capture the essence of Marvel's flagship feral mutant.

By far the coolest maneuver we saw was Wolverine's lunge move. With no ranged attacks, he needs a way to close the distance, and this is the ideal one. Claws out, arms akimbo, Wolverine launches through the air with a roar at his targeted foe. The impact knocks the unfortunate enemy off his feet and adamantium claws finish the job. It's an iconic Wolvie move, and Raven has nailed it. From the demo we saw, it seemed the lunge isn't relegated to certain set-piece scenarios, either – Wolverine integrates it seamlessly into his fighting style.

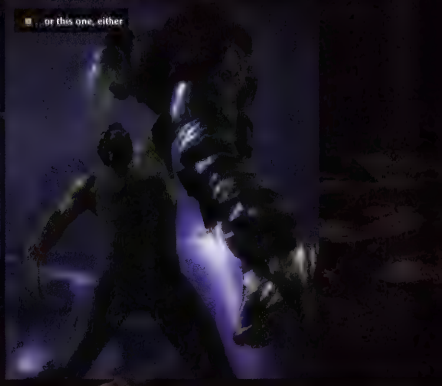
That's not to say that scripted cinematic action sequences aren't part of the package. We saw a multi-stage battle against a Sentinel that culminates with Wolverine free-falling after the giant robot from the upper stratosphere and ripping it apart piece-by-piece midair, and that's hardly the only one in the game. The best part of these set pieces, however, is that they feature natural control rather than the over-done God of War-style button sequences.

The inclusion of movie assets and an impressive likeness of Hugh Jackman give the surprisingly gory presentation authority. Procedural damage to Wolverine that gradually heals as his regeneration takes effect can be somewhat disturbing – gaping wounds that lay bare his skeleton are rather explicit. Likewise, the catastrophic damage his claws inflict on enemies is often brutal to the point of being shocking. While this aspect lends a certain weight to the action and greatly contributes to the sense of Wolverine being an unstoppable engine of destruction, some may find it to be a bit much.

Raven is hardly reinventing the wheel, but this title looks on track to possibly be a good game rather than licensed shovelware. ■■■



■ Something tells us Wolverine isn't interested in getting this guy to talk...



■ ...or this one, either



The set pieces get so much more extreme than this

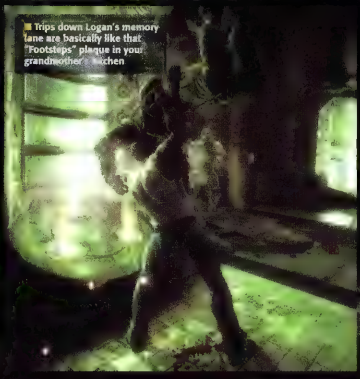


Here you can marvel (huh, huh) at the procedural damage on Wolverine





This whirlwind attack costs rage points to execute



Trips down Logan's memory lane are basically like that "Footsteps" plaque in your grandmother's kitchen

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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Section 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK AND XBOX LIVE, UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** TIMEGATE > **RELEASE** FALL

## THE SKY IS FALLING



Any new first-person shooter must stand out if it wants to survive in the current era of FPS proliferation. If your shooter also features sci-fi marines in bulky exoskeleton armor, you'll have to paddle extra hard to keep from drowning. TimeGate, the studio behind the PC strategy series Kohan and the F.E.A.R. expansions, thinks its original ideas will keep its game afloat.

Section 8 stands out with its willingness to dive right into the action – literally. On the war-torn battlefields of tomorrow, mankind's greatest conflicts are with its own planetary colonies. The 8th Armored Infantry was formed to be the first responders to any galactic conflict. Jumping out of large orbital dropships, they burn through the atmosphere before crashing into a war zone.

Jumping onto the battlefield like sci-fi paratroopers isn't just a story gimmick, it's a gameplay feature. "One of the mandates that we had with creating Section 8 was trying to create a very dynamic world, a very player-driven world," says producer Robert Siwiak. One of the ways Section 8 lets players have more control over the game is by letting them pick where they jump onto the map every time they spawn in both the single and multiplayer portions of the title.

"It's like a tactical bird's eye view of the battlefield," Siwiak says. "You'll have the ability to react to the circumstances you see below you. Let's say I have a sniper rifle and I see a tank below, I might not be equipped to take on that tank, so I'm going to pop the brakes and I'm going to drift over and land on top of a rock outcropping." Then again, a player equipped to handle tanks could just as easily choose to slam straight into the tank, immediately planting explosives on the metal beast. But this presumes the player survives the fall. With all the artillery flying through the air and the tactical placement of your opponents AA guns, the first 10-second jump into the battle could be just as exciting as the last 10-second stand off.

Considering how dangerous the orbital drop is, players must properly prepare for the battle. Like many games, Section 8 allows players to customize their loadout. But instead of just choosing between assault rifles and shotguns, players also pick active and passive gear that will aid them on the battlefield. These modules could be anything from repair tools to augments that boost their armor or sprint speed. It's clear that TimeGate has some fresh ideas it's trying to incorporate into the FPS formula, but only time will tell if the execution matches the creativity. ■■■



■ Passive gear will include things like shoulder-mounted mortar launchers, jet pack explosives, and mods that help you jump higher or have your shields recharge faster. What's more, gear will be stackable, so if you take three shield modules, your shields will see three times the boost

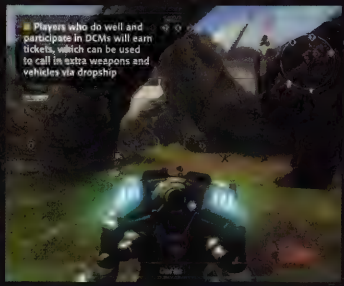





TimeGate is planning to offer bots, so players who are offline can still enjoy multiplayer. These bots can also be used to round out smaller online matches

## NOT FIT FOR SERVICE

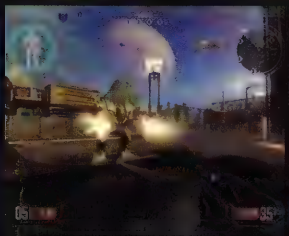
Though it no longer exists, Section 8 was once a term used by the military to discharge soldiers deemed too psychologically unfit or "crazy" for active service. The term has slowly crept into more modern usage as slang for servicemen who willingly throw themselves into dangerous battlefield situations. TimeGate appropriated the term as a nickname for its 8th Armored Infantry. After all, any group of guys willing to jump headfirst into battle from space might just be a little crazy.



Players who do well and participate in DCMs will earn tickets, which can be used to call in extra weapons and vehicles via dropship



It's raining men. Hallelujah!



## NO MORE SPAWN CAMPING

In addition to the general multiplayer objective of capturing enemy control points, Timegate is creating a gameplay system called Dynamic Combat Missions. "We wanted to give players a tool to go on more active missions," says producer Robert Siwiak. DCMs function like a metagame inside a standard game match. In the average online experience, a player who chooses to play the sniper might miss a lot of the action if no one walks by his or her perch. In Section 8, that player can choose a sniping DCM that has them actively hunting down and assassinating one of the opponent's VIPs. These DCMs are designed to keep every player actively participating in the battle. Missions vary from sneaking into a base and hacking some data to demolishing a key structure and organizing your team to stop a convoy from reaching its destination. DCMs are always optional, but they'll keep players tired of the routine from getting bored.



XBOX 360

# Halo Wars

> **STYLE** 1- OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER LOCAL OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

## ONE LAST HURRAH

Our recent hands-on session with the latest build of Halo Wars makes Microsoft's decision to close down developer Ensemble Studios more baffling than ever. The game is on the path to redefine console real-time strategy, and the developer's reward is a pink slip. Regardless, the good news for gamers is that the title is coming along quite nicely.

Halo Wars' clever control scheme fits the gameplay like a glove. The shoulder buttons and triggers select unit groups and sub-groups, while the face buttons give orders and the d-pad quickly jumps to various points of interest. This is a brilliant solution to the console RTS dilemma. For the first time, you may miss some console functions when you go back to PC RTS titles.

We played through the first several missions of the campaign, and while the core gameplay is classic RTS bread and butter, the frills around it are superb. Fourteen (as of now) lengthy cinematics from renowned FMV studio Blur cover up the loads between missions and give new insight into the Halo universe. The maps are loaded with secrets and goodies; each mission has a hidden skull and a black box that serve as collectibles as well as additional challenges. Skulls work in classic Halo fashion, upping the difficulty and giving bragging rights (and achievements!) while black boxes unlock backstory bits.

Another twist to the campaign is that you can play through the entire thing cooperatively over Xbox Live or system link. The objectives aren't built specifically to support co-op play like in Red Alert 3, but the large maps make for natural divisions of labor. Maybe one player handles base building while the other commands the army, or you take a small raiding force to harass or distract while your buddy brings the main army to the enemy's front door, or you simply split control between two bases and work together that way.

We also took control of Covenant forces in the skirmish mode (sadly, there is no Covenant campaign). A few major differences distinguish them from the human UNSC forces and should provide satisfactorily asymmetric gameplay. UNSC players can expand their armies to include up to three Spartans. Meanwhile, Covenant players choose one super-powered leader from among three options: the Arbiter, the Prophet of Regret, and a Brute Chieftain. These leaders are fearsome in their own right, with powerful weapons, tons of health, and devastating special abilities. Most importantly, however, every Covenant base comes equipped with a gravity pad that effectively teleports units to your hero's position. Experienced RTS players should be short of breath right now thinking about the multiplayer potential of that particular ability.

Competitive multiplayer features the expected party-based or solo matchmaking and leaderboards via Xbox Live, and the skirmish maps we saw are as densely packed as any campaign mission. Neutral sites guarded by independents can provide expansion bases, major economy boosts, or other tactical and strategic advantages.

Halo Wars' release is almost upon us, and everything about the game looks well on the way to being a more than worthy entry in the lauded franchise. ■■■

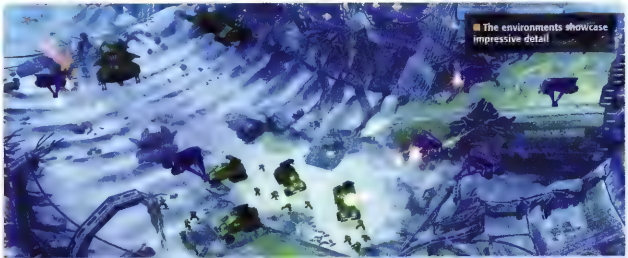


Sniper towers like the ones seen here give troops fantastic defensive bonuses



Covenant shields like you see here will allow infantry but not vehicles to pass





The environments showcase impressive detail



DS

# Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
**> DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR LEEDS **> RELEASE** MARCH 17

## YEAR OF THE OX

Working on a smaller platform isn't stopping Rockstar from thinking big. Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars commandeers the Nintendo DS to deliver the same bombastic mix of humor, violence, and vehicular mayhem found on consoles.

Chinatown Wars begins with its main character, Huang Lee, flying to Liberty City following the assassination of his father, a Triad boss. The job is simple — deliver the family heirloom, a sword that symbolizes Triad power, to the ambitious uncle who stands to succeed his father — but the airport welcoming committee greets Lee with a hail of bullets instead of a sympathy bouquet. Thinking Lee is dead, the henchmen throw him in the backseat and drive the car into the river. After escaping the sinking car, Lee must penetrate the seedy Chinatown underground to recover the sword and restore family honor.

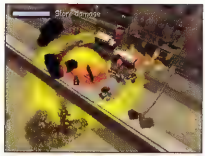
In the years since it created Liberty City Stories for the PSP, the development team at Rockstar Leeds has doubled in size, and extra manpower is evident from the moment you boot up the game. Chinatown Wars dons an angled, top-down 3D view reminiscent of the first two GTA titles. The camera contextually rotates 360 degrees during gameplay to give gamers the best view of high-speed getaways, helicopter battles, and alleyway gunfights. This iteration of Liberty City is nearly as large as its console cousin (losing only one of the boroughs, Alderney), and the game world operates on a 24-hour day/night cycle featuring a dynamic weather system.

Rockstar altered the game's mission and HUD structures to accommodate the new platform, but anyone who played GTA IV will notice the similarities. The bottom screen serves as your PDA, which can be used to set your GPS, check email, order ammo, change music stations, and access multiplayer modes. Lee accepts missions from characters he meets throughout the game, but you can also replay missions from the pictures hung up on the refrigerator located in your safe house. Replaying missions to get better scores allows you to achieve more medals, one of the several changes made to give the game an arcade feel.

With The Lost And The Damned downloadable content and Chinatown Wars due in the first few months of 2009, Grand Theft Auto fans certainly won't be hurting for options. ■■■

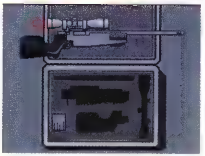












## Minigame Mayhem

**Leave it to Rockstar to take advantage of the touchscreen in sordid new ways. During the course of your everyday activities in Chinatown Wars, you'll use the touchscreen in a variety of minigames for jacking cars, escaping drowning vehicles, arming bombs, making Molotov cocktails, and even searching dumpsters for ammo.**

## The Pusher

**Huang Lee can make money by completing missions for his bosses, but he's also an entrepreneurial soldier. Liberty City has a bad drug habit, and Lee can make a killing by catering to the addiction. The six drug types in the game fluctuate in value depending on the demand, which Lee can track with his PDA. To make the most of the economic conditions, Lee must buy and sell the right drugs at the right time. Pricing is affected by area security and police presence, so Lee can swing the market to his advantage by taking out security cameras in his territories to increase traffic while keeping his competitors under lockdown by leaving the cameras up in their territory.**

## The Getaway

**Ditching the cops just got a hell of a lot more dangerous. With Chinatown Wars' new police chase logic, players will spend a lot more time behind the wheel of the car driving for their lives. Rather than evading police cars until you're in the clear like in past GTA games, players must now lower wanted levels by disabling squad cars without killing the cops. Turning Unit 52 into 52 Pickup won't be easy; your best bet is drawing the pursuers into oncoming traffic or running them off the road. Put your Allstate agent on speed dial, because these frenzied chases will undoubtedly spike the number of car accidents in Liberty City.**

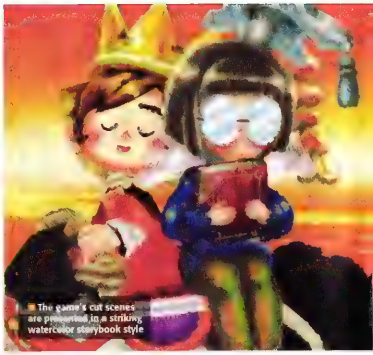


Wii

# Little King's Story

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** XSEED GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** CING > **RELEASE** JANUARY

## A LITTLE KING'S RANSOM



The game's cut scenes are presented in a striking watercolor storybook style

What would you do if, as a child, you discovered the power to tell everyone what to do? Would you become a noble king who leads your village into a golden age of prosperity, or would you make your parents bake you cookies for breakfast and have your brother give you piggyback rides to the comic store? Oddly enough, the protagonist of Little King's Story takes the noble approach to being a monarch.

When a young lad name Chrobo discovers a magical crown that unlocks his natural charisma, he is promptly elevated to the position of king in his village. With the assistance of a knight named Hauser, Chrobo must nurture his small town into a vast kingdom.

This hybrid role-playing and real-time strategy title has a few similarities to Nintendo's Pikmin franchise. Chrobo leads a pack of mindless villagers about the land ordering them to clear boulders off the road, dig up hidden treasures, gather materials for the town, and fight any wild beasts foolish enough to cross his path. By sending lazy villagers into specific training buildings, Chrobo can turn them into soldiers, farmers, archers, and carpenters, all of whom have specific abilities.

Like most kings, Chrobo can't do much other than order people around, so it's up to his subjects to get all the real work in the kingdom done. Unlike many RTS games, however, every citizen has his own name and personality. At first, many villagers might hesitate to follow the orders of some brash kid, but if you keep them alive for a while, you start earning their loyalty. The older citizens become, the more willing they will be to blindly follow your edicts.

However, just because villagers are old doesn't mean they'll look it. A villager's health is represented by their appearance. The more damage each character takes the more they visually age. So if the only soldiers in your troop are wrinkly old men, it's probably a bad idea to head into battle. When one of your citizens does die, the next day your town will hold a funeral in their honor. Don't worry about your unwashed masses dwindling to extinction, because mysterious strangers will continually wash up onto your shores, eager to join your society.

Little King's Story sounds like a cute little adventure, but RPG fans should take a special interest in this game, as the development staff is made up of lead creators from games such as Harvest Moon, Final Fantasy XII, and Dragon Quest VIII. Even if you don't care about any of those titles, you still might get a kick out of this quirky title if you're the kind of person who likes to order people around. ■■■







When strangers with amnesia wash up on your shore, you'll never know who to expect. You might get stuck with a bunch of punky children who are more interested in playing than following orders



The town square is an important part of any city. Not only will your subjects leave notes for you in the town's mailbox, but they'll hold festivals there each time you defeat a boss

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XBOX 360

# Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** D3 **> DEVELOPER** TAMSOFT **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10




Apart from Saki and Aya, you can select the gun-toting Anna as a playable character

## TOO MUCH IS NOT ENOUGH

Video games have advanced to the point that they can tell sophisticated stories, but sometimes it's nice to unwind with a title that doesn't take itself so seriously. If you ever find yourself in the mood to play the gaming equivalent of popcorn movies (like Earth Defense Force 2017), keep an eye on D3's upcoming Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad.

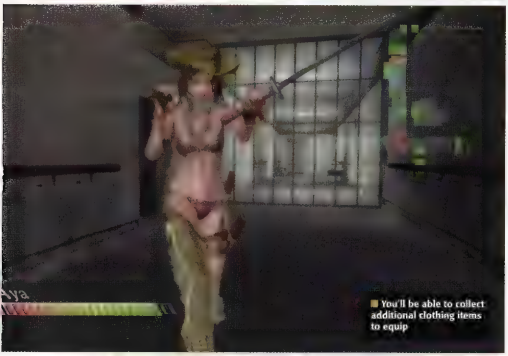
"Onechanbara is a game of half-naked sexy women samurai who swing katanas around slicing zombies to pieces," explains Tamsoft vice president Okajima Nobuyuki. "When the zombies are dripping with blood, they paint the sexy samurai red with counter-block action and bring them into rage mode, causing the girls to slice zombies at a faster rate."

A simple concept can go a long way, and Onechanbara combines sword-wielding heroines with lots of easily dismembered enemies to create ridiculous levels of camp and gore. Two of the main characters, Aya and Saki, are members of an ancient bloodline that bestows special powers…but it also makes them targets for hordes of attacking zombies. The onslaught isn't all bad, though; killing zombies allows the girls to unlock their full potential.

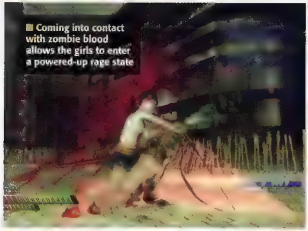
"In order to bring out the power of the Imichi it is necessary for the girls to drench themselves in tainted zombie blood," Nobuyuki tells us. "That is why Aya is in a bikini, allowing her skin to be exposed. Saki, on the other hand, has more deeply rooted Imichi than Aya, so it is not necessary for her to wear a bikini to expose her skin as much as Aya."

The action consists of fast-paced sword-play that you can play alone or with a friend via local co-op. You start with basic attacks, but as you mutilate your undead enemies and gain experience, you can customize your skills and abilities. "You can distribute between energy, combat power, the area around your combat (reach), the increase in the number of continuous attacks that you can do," Nobuyuki says. "Basically, you can tailor your character's strengths and experience to your liking."

After you've exhausted all of your combat options with the first batch of characters, you can expand your experience with downloadable content that will unlock three playable enemy characters named Reiko, Misery, and Himiko. No matter which character you select, Onechanbara: Bikini Samurai Squad looks like it will provide bloody combos, frenzied action, and a fun co-op atmosphere. It may not be the classiest title of 2009, but entertainment doesn't always need to be refined. ■■■



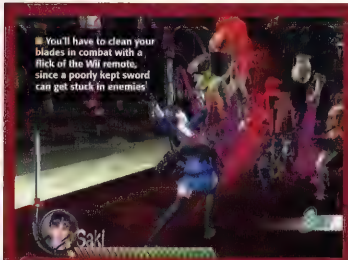

You'll be able to collect additional clothing items to equip



Coming into contact with zombie blood allows the girls to enter a powered-up rage state




Zombies are like pressurized sacks of gore ready to burst




You'll have to clean your blades in combat with a flick of the Wii remote, since a poorly kept sword can get stuck in enemies




Allocating experience can increase a variety of combat statistics

### WiiSlay

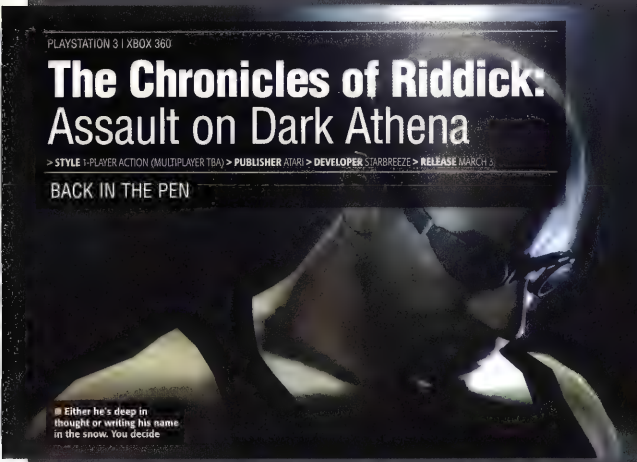
**Bikini Samurai Squad won't be your only chance to get the Onechanbara experience. A Wii version entitled Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers will release at the same time as its Xbox 360 counterpart, though the two titles contain different stories and gameplay. "Players can only use the Wii remote and the nunchuk, and intuitively cut up the enemies with the variety of motions," says Tamsoft vice president Okajima Nobuyuki. "For instance, when using two blades you can move each hand, and being that you are maneuvering and coordinating each hand, you can really feel a strong sense of presence." If you're interested in following the storyline, the 360 game comes first chronologically, followed by the Wii title. "The Wii version and Xbox 360 version are completely different matters," Nobuyuki insists, "but each one is a blazing high-speed action game!"**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

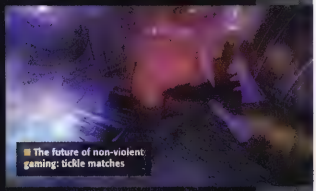
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** STARBREEZE > **RELEASE** MARCH 3

## BACK IN THE PEN



■ Either he's deep in thought or writing his name in the snow. You decide





■ The future of non-violent gaming: tickle matches

The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena takes place immediately following the events of The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, but don't think of using the s-word. "To be clear, this is not a sequel," says Ian Stevens, head of game production at Vin Diesel's Tigon Studios. "We look at it as the next chapter in a story that's episodic."

The game is set on the Dark Athena, a slave ship that picks up Riddick's escape pod while he is dozing off in suspended animation. After learning their captive has a bounty attached to his head, the ship's crew is ordered to recapture the now-escaped antihero. If you missed the first Riddick game for some reason, don't worry. It's included in the package, and players can choose to play either right out of the gate.

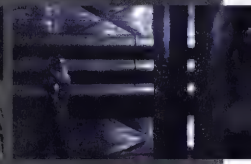
Starbreeze has given Escape from Butcher Bay an overhaul that goes beyond a new coat of paint. "As a producer, I can vouch for this being a humongous task," says Samuel Ranta-Eskola. "It's been like making two games. It's required a lot of work. As you release a game, you have a ton of things that you want to fix. We were able to complete a few of those, and a few frustrating moments were fixed. I know some people had a lot of trouble navigating their way out of the mines in the previous version, so we've fixed that."

As with Escape from Butcher Bay, Assault on Dark Athena is a first-person shooter with plenty of stealth elements. If you prefer running and gunning, though, that style seems to be more viable than before. The ship is constantly patrolled by Ghost Drones, which are typical space bad guys with an interesting twist. They operate in two different modes — an AI-controlled state and one in which they're remotely controlled by mercenaries. When they're being guided by mercs, Riddick faces more intelligent tactics. Don't worry — Riddick gets plenty of opportunities to drive drones, too.

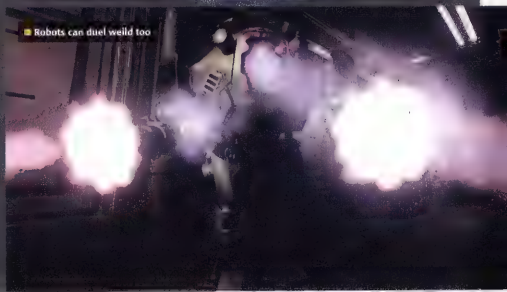
After killing an enemy, Riddick faces an interesting problem: Their guns are physically attached. Rather than attempt to saw off the offending limb with his scary-looking Ulak knives, Riddick just grabs the whole drone — gun, body, and all — and uses it to his advantage. Even though it's in someone else's hand, he can pull the trigger on the weapon as well as use the body as a human shield. Riddick sacrifices a lot of mobility though, and he's only able to move backward.

The game was originally set for a September 2008 release, but it dropped off the map for a while during the Activision Blizzard merger. Stevens says the time they had between publishers worked to the game's favor. "I think it was probably the most blissful period of development that any of us have had in a decade-plus of making games. The result is the most polished game that Starbreeze has ever released. I think we're definitely happy about having had this opportunity and have moved on to a partner, like Atari and working with Phil Harrison obviously. Also, Jim Wilson, Atari's CEO, was our CEO at Universal Interactive who started the first game and greenlit that and funded it. So we really got the band back together in a strange, ironic way. It's been a good experience for us." ■■■

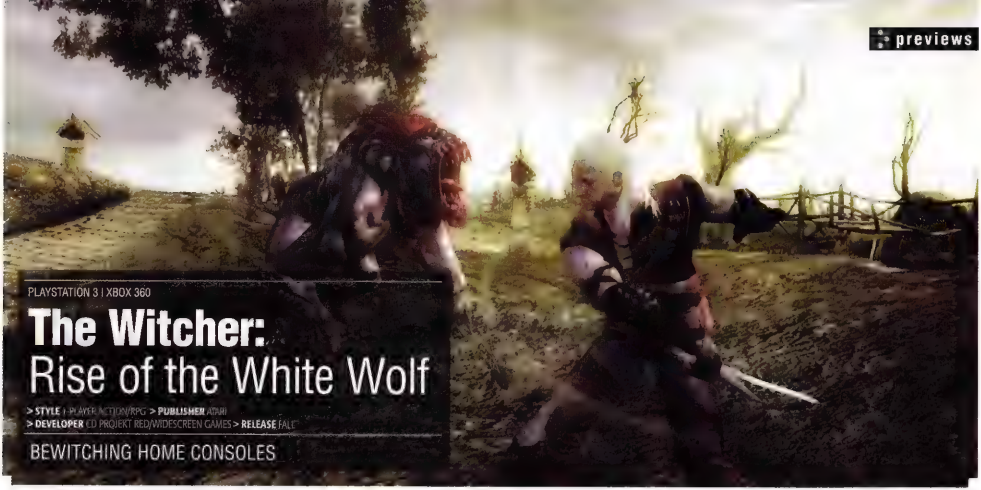








■ Robots can duel weild too



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# The Witcher: Rise of the White Wolf

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** CD PROJEKT RED/WIDESCREEN GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

## BEWITCHING HOME CONSOLES

Polish developer CD Projekt RED's original PC release of The Witcher in 2007 was an unlikely hit, selling over a million copies worldwide. Come next fall, console gamers will get a chance to experience unconventional hero Geralt's rough-around-the edges style as he takes down mythical beasts and woos the ladies in this offline RPG.

"There are still a lot of gamers out there who've either never heard of the game or just can't play it because they don't have a gaming-capable PC," says CD Projekt senior designer Jakub Stylinski. "We want as many people as possible to experience The Witcher, and that's probably the leading factor in our decision to make Rise of the White Wolf."

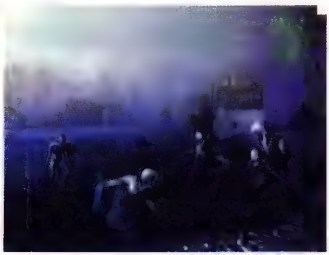
New character animations, enemy AI, and redesigned boss fights are all in the mix, but the biggest concern when any game jumps from PC to console is always the controls. "We wanted to meet console users' expectations, so we're giving them full control of Geralt during combat," Stylinski says. "The interface is also being created from scratch to make sure that it's very intuitive and fits with what people expect in a console game. We still want to present the same depth of gameplay and are making sure that the interface works in that context."

Will the game have expanded missions or story content? "We're making a few little tweaks, but overall the quests and story are staying the same," says Tom Ohle, VP of public relations and marketing at CD Projekt. "We think that console gamers are looking for this kind of grand, epic story – the game can last anywhere from 40 to 100 hours, depending on how deep you go in the side quests. We want as many people as possible to experience that story."

Some Witcher fans on message boards like to brag that they've played the "uncensored" European version of the game that includes slightly more racy imagery. So will adult North American gamers get a chance this time around to play the game as it was originally intended? "It's a bit early to say, but I'd hope that we can keep the game content intact," says Ohle. "We're aiming for a mature game, in any case." ■■■









■ The combat system has been completely revamped for consoles



■ "Witch this, baby dragon!"

PC

# Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** LATE FEBRUARY

## NEW DAY RISING

Famed real-time strategy developer Relic Entertainment is gearing up for Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II, and the news coming out of the company has us all the more excited to see how this game turns out. We recently spoke to lead designer Jonny Ebbert, who had much to say about the workings of the game's multiplayer component.

The single-player campaign's nonlinear structure and focus on tactical action with small upgradeable squads of human Space Marines has been well detailed at this point. Multiplayer, however, cleaves closer to genre norms. Similarly to the previous Dawn of War title, players build bases and capture control points while engaging in direct combat. However, players' attention will still be directed more toward their units – as Ebbert tells it, "We want you focused on your units and making sure they're kicking as much ass as humanly possible." To that end, upgrades are housed on the troops themselves rather than buildings, and the tech trees have been streamlined.

In addition to standard mano-a-mano deathmatching, Relic has great hopes for DoW II's three-on-three online matches. "We think this mode is something that everyone can enjoy, because you have multiple roles you can play on the battlefield," explains Ebbert. The intention is that the races and tech trees allow players to focus on healing and support if they're not comfortable with frontline action, or infiltration and misdirection if building a base and churning out armies isn't their forte. "We think we have a role for all types of playstyles, and that we've created a low-pressure game mode where everyone can contribute," Ebbert says.

This sequel comes with new technology under the hood, as well. Dawn of War II benefits from a host of new features like environmental destruction, improved squad AI, and buildings that can be garrisoned. "The result has been a quantum leap in terms what we could do in Dawn of War II," Ebbert contends. "The interactions you have with the terrain make the experience way more engrossing."

We don't have much longer to wait until the game's late February release, and in our opinion that's a great thing. Dawn of War II looks like a great answer to the dearth of titles around this time of year. ■■■



■ The art style, as always, is ripped straight from the original Games Workshop books



■ Do we really have to have the discussion about where the Protoss and Zerg came from again?



■ Fans of Dawn of War or Company of Heroes will be right at home in the multiplayer here

## WARHAMMER'S WARRIORS

The iconic Space Marines are joined by Eldar, Tyranids, and Orks in online play. Lead designer Jonny Ebbert has a few words to say about each:

**Space Marines** are the hero race. Your squads are small but pack twice the punch of the other races. They're also the race that lets you customize your squad roles the most.

**Eldar** are the ninja race. They do a lot of damage but they are more fragile than the other races. They rely on speed, deception, and outmaneuvering the other player.

**Tyranids** are the swarm race. They can race out and cover a map quickly. Their swarm units won't be able to hold the map alone, though. You'll need your larger specialist units to support them.

**Orks** are the horde race. They get stronger the more numerous they are, and they have all kinds of crazy gadgets that will surprise the enemy.



The Jatta are sweet-looking to start with

PC

# Stargate Worlds

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** FIRESKY
> **DEVELOPER** CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN > **RELEASE** SPRING

## STARGAZING

The team at Cheyenne Mountain is aiming for the sky with their first product. MMORPGs are far from the simplest games to create, but Stargate Worlds has some intriguing ideas at play and may raise some eyebrows when it releases next year.

The fledgling developer is working with Hollywood giants MGM and Fox in order to tightly integrate the game with the next Stargate television series. The plan is for the world to reflect events in the show, including post-release content updates that highlight the settings and conflicts taking place in the currently airing episodes. If it's pulled off well, this relationship could attain a whole new level of fan service.

Inevitable comparisons to NCsoft's ill-fated Tabula Rasa come up in Stargate's favor. The combat mechanic is similar, with players quasi-aiming their weapons, but the spreadsheet under the hood works out hits, misses, and damage calculations. Cover is key, and noted by a clever interface widget that shows you where enemy fire is coming from and the angles from which you're protected. Special abilities for different weapons, like spraying full-auto fire from a sub-machine gun, are activated in traditional MMO fashion. In our hands-on time with the game, the core mechanic feels surprisingly solid despite some technical rough edges.

Character progression for the seven classes, like Soldier and Scientist, works much like any other MMO, with experience granting levels that open up new abilities and paths for customizing your avatar. Content likewise falls into familiar grooves, where players work together to confront progressively larger threats. Stargate uses phasing techniques similar to those seen in Wrath of the Lich King to give the game world the illusion of changing through player actions. For instance, as you advance the storyline in one major city, the backdrop slowly changes from a peaceful sky to a roiling atmosphere thick with hostile warships.

Stargate Worlds has a way to go before it's ready for prime time, but the competent combat and cool ideas like Flash-based minigames that let you interact with the world from any capable web browser show promise. As we've seen in the last few years, the online space is big enough for many games to happily coexist – even if they can't all be World of Warcraft. ■■■



The Asgard look much cooler in their powered battle suits

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Bionic Commando

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** GRIN > **RELEASE** SPRING

## THE LIFE BIONIC



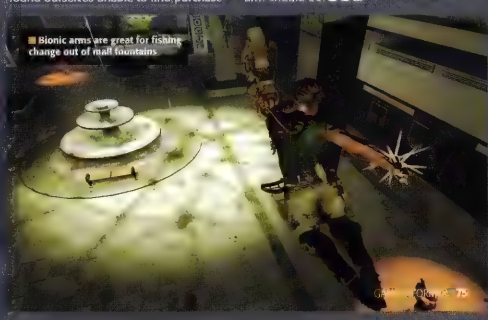
Dreadlocks and waterfalls: enemies since the beginning of time

If you were a gamer during the 8-bit era, you probably played Bionic Commando on the NES. Despite its punishing difficulty, there was just something irresistible about swinging through the world with a big metal arm. In 2008, Capcom capitalized on that fondness with the downloadable remake Bionic Commando: Rearmed, but you haven't heard the last of Nathan "Radd" Spencer. He's swinging into action again, and we got our hands on the latest version of the upcoming sequel.

Unsurprisingly, the most important mechanic is Spencer's bionic arm. It is your main form of transportation, whether you're exploring the world or combating enemies. However, unlike the Spider-Man games, swinging and maintaining momentum isn't handled automatically. You need to manually aim and extend the arm each time you grapple an object, which takes some practice. Once we got the hang of the inertia (it's counterintuitive at first), we were cruising through a ruined metropolis with ease. Just about everything in the world can be grappled, so we rarely found ourselves unable to find purchase on something nearby. Even if you flub up and fall, Spencer doesn't take damage from long drops.

The thrill of fast traversal is cool, but you'll occasionally have to stop to take out pockets of enemies, like soldiers, snipers, and heavily armored biomechs. Your arm helps you out in these situations in numerous ways; in addition to maneuvering around your foes, you can pick up objects to throw at them, or even grab them and retract your arm to deliver a cool flying jump kick. There are some instances where you can't count on your mobility, though. We saw one boss fight against a giant mechanical worm that takes place in the middle of a parking lot – with no higher ground in sight. It's a good thing you can grab and throw nearby cars.

We ran into a few rough patches in our time with Bionic Commando – like difficulty balancing and encounter variety – but the version we played wasn't final. Those issues could be smoothed out before the game's spring release. Until then, we'll have to cope with this empty spot in our lives where a bionic arm should be. ■■■



Bionic arms are great for fishing change out of mall fountains

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# Dark Void

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** AIRTIGHT GAMES > **RELEASE** 2009

## UP AND AT THEM!

Developer Airtight Games has been hoarding details about its upcoming shooter-with-a-rocket-pack Dark Void since its announcement in October 2007, but we managed to get some more information about it, including a tour of some all-new areas and encounters with a few previously unseen enemies.

The mission Airtight showed takes place shortly after our hero Will Grey upgraded from a hoverpack to a full-on rocket pack. After knocking out a force field, he must fly into a bell-shaped core to take out some machinery inside. Lead designer Jose Perez showed off one of the ways to pull off the mission, ascending into the structure by using the game's unique vertical cover system. Daredevil pilots could opt for a far more dangerous tactic, simply flying blindly up into the core — though that strategy is likely to end in a crash. Don't say we didn't warn you.

After knocking the core out, Will took to the skies and battled a few UFOs — one of two vehicles Perez says players can drive in the game. That's when we spied one of Dark Void's larger enemies, the Archon. Will dismantled the mechanical exterior piece by piece, from its deadly nose cannon to the tip of its colossal tail through a series of button-mashing sequences (similar to how he hijacks UFOs). Eventually the pilot popped out for a little mano-a-alien battle. The Sarpa — a strange looking creature with four limbs and a manta ray-like head — was no match for Will, and his day was over almost as quickly as the demo.

Next, we witnessed some of the game's other environments, including a quick peek at a jungle-themed area that showed that Dark Void's color spectrum extends beyond just "mud" and "brown rock." The

■ Will tears open the crunchy shell of this Archon boss to expose the gooey center



When it comes to flying, Will is more interested in function over form.





level was filled with vines and other plant life, and featured a large Sarpa-shaped monument. Talking with Perez, it seems as though those creatures are as important to the story as another prominent paranormal phenomenon.

"The Bermuda Triangle was always something as a kid I thought was so cool," he says. "[It's] one of those things that's so mysterious to kids and grownups alike. That kind of gave us that idea of a parallel dimension; our writer Jeff is a pretty nutty guy, and he's been reading too many conspiracy theories that are all over the place online about the Reptilians. We're definitely tapping into a lot of that."

As unlikely as it may sound, there is an actual community of people who believe in the existence of Reptilian puppet-masters. These ancient space-faring beasts have purportedly been involved in human civilization for centuries, and their kind has infiltrated the upper political echelons worldwide. Human fear is nourishment to these creatures, which they milk through manipulation of human conflict. Even if you think these believers are crackpots, you have to admit they've got some great material for games.

In our short experience with a few of Dark Void's levels, it's clear that no matter where the story takes us, Will's going to draw on an arsenal of gadgets as well as his skills as a former military pilot to get the job done. His rocket pack resuscitates some stale shooter mechanics, greatly changing enemy encounters by letting Will dart into the air, swoop down, and blast confused enemies from behind. Keep your eyes toward the skies in the next few months, when the game is set to launch. ■■■

Will's equipment will get several upgrades throughout the game, which will affect the look of the HUD as well







Keiji Inafune has been a key part of Capcom for decades, working on everything from character design on Mega Man 1 to producing contemporary games like Dead Rising and Lost Planet. We caught up with Inafune, head of research and development and online business at Capcom, and talked about the experience of working with a western developer and more.

*How does working with an American development team differ from working with Japanese?*

It really varies from project to project, depending on the ratio of how much of the concept comes from Capcom and how much comes from the party that we're teaming up with... A key point for us in our approach is to maintain what's good about overseas games and what helps games sell overseas, and we make a point of not giving orders and not giving directions. We're helping inform the process with advice, but we're not taking away from the abilities of the development team.

*We imagine it might be intimidating to receive advice from the man who essentially created Mega Man. Is there a culture at Capcom where people are able to listen to your feedback and say, "Eh, thanks but no thanks."?*

It's really important that our partners are able to voice their opinions. Of course, if they give them, that's important as well. In Japan, there's nobody who immediately agrees with anything that I say. They'll listen to what I'll say, but if they differ then they'll make that opinion felt. That's the kind of environment and atmosphere and relationship that we want to build with our overseas partners as well.

*It's probably fair to say that flight is a universal interest. Do you think that the flight angle in Dark Void could be helpful in attracting Japanese gamers?*

Certainly, I'm hoping that's the case. However for Japanese players to really enjoy it, there needs to be more than just flying or just having a cool-looking rocket pack...The idea of wish fulfillment in games — being able to do something in games that you can't do in real life — is common to all users, whether that's flying or shooting.

# PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



Wii

## The House of the Dead: Overkill

We recently played the first two levels of Headstrong Games' new grindhouse take on House of the Dead and were (expectedly) grossed out but surprisingly amused by the over-the-top campiness. The story plays out like a buddy cop movie with the calm and collected Agent G and the over-excited, f-bomb-dropping Detective Washington. Gunplay works smoothly, and a combo system encourages accuracy. A points-based continue setup means that while anyone can beat the game, skilled players will earn cash faster to spend on new guns and upgrades. With two-player co-op, you can show your friends all the [illegible] with ease. Keep an eye out for this grown-ups-only Wii title this February.






NINTENDO DS

## Gardening Mama

Everyone knows Mama is an ace in the kitchen, but pretty soon she'll have an excuse to show off her green thumb as well. Majesco's new title from the Cooking Mama team turns the DS into a soil-rich garden. Gamers can seed their little green patches, and they'll need to tend to their sprouts as they begin to bloom and mature. Once a full crop is produced, players reap their delicious rewards by turning berries into jam or carving fresh pumpkins into jack-'o-lanterns. Gardening Mama lets up to four players compete to see who can tend the best garden. Expect this game to be ready for harvest later this spring.

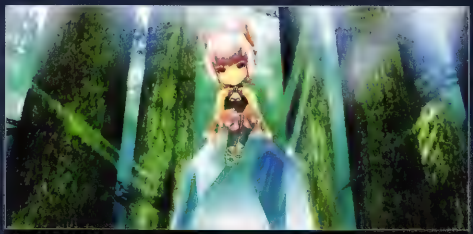
NINTENDO DS

## Blood of Bahamut

Blood of Bahamut is a mysterious new title by Square Enix for DS featuring real-time combat in an unusual RPG setting. The title is not even halfway complete, but judging by screens, a small trailer, and scarce details, DS fans may want to keep this one on their radar. The story is set in a world where people built cities on the backs of sleeping giant beasts, and when the beasts awakened, hell did, too. With over 130 missions, seven unique heroes, over 150 variations of jumbo two-screened goliaths, and local four-player co-op, there is reason to get excited. Fans of Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings on DS will be pleased to know Eisuke Yokoyama is also producing this title. Unfortunately there is no official release date at this time.







Wii | NINTENDO DS

## Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time

The newest entry in the Crystal Chronicles offshoot to Final Fantasy deals with a mysterious disease known as crystal sickness. To find a cure, our unnamed hero must leave the comfort of his hometown for the first time in his life. The story might not sound overly original, and the graphics certainly don't impress on the Wii, but Echoes of Time earns some big points for innovation elsewhere. Both the Wii and DS versions are the same, which means gamers can use either version to play with people using both systems online. This will be the first game to cross-pollinate between a console and a handheld device like this, so we're excited to see if Square Enix can pull it off before the game's spring release.

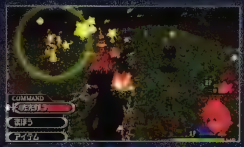


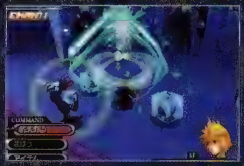
NINTENDO DS

## Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days

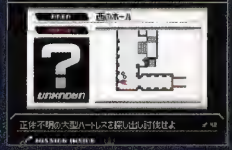


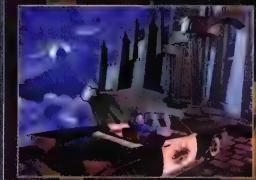
Now that Re:Chain of Memories has hit North America, Square Enix finally confirmed that "Three Five Eight Days Over Two" will release here as well. While Sora's taking a year-long snooze between CoM and KH 2, players control Roxas as he joins and eventually leaves Organization XIII. A new 14th member of the organization, Xion, plays a major role in the story, though her motives are unclear at this point. Four-player local multiplayer lets fans control their favorite organization member as they work together (and against) each other to complete a series of missions. No U.S. release date has been announced, but using the February Japan launch as a guide, we won't see 358/2 until late summer or early fall.





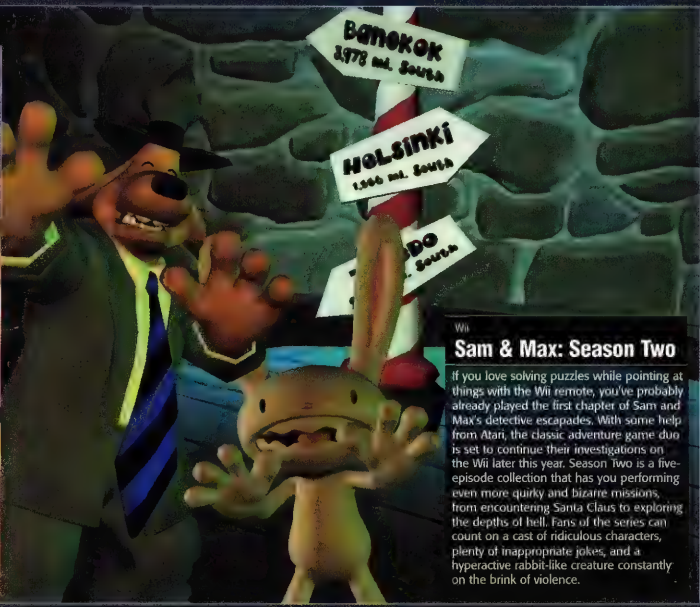











Wii

## Sam & Max: Season Two

If you love solving puzzles while pointing at things with the Wii remote, you've probably already played the first chapter of Sam and Max's detective escapades. With some help from Atari, the classic adventure game duo is set to continue their investigations on the Wii later this year. Season Two is a five-episode collection that has you performing even more quirky and bizarre missions, from encountering Santa Claus to exploring the depths of hell. Fans of the series can count on a cast of ridiculous characters, plenty of inappropriate jokes, and a hyperactive rabbit-like creature constantly on the brink of violence.

# REVIEWS

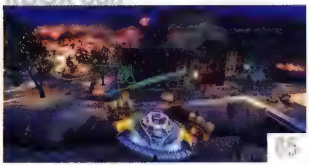
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



Rise of the Argonauts

XBOX 360



Destroy All Humans!: Path of the Furon

WII




Rygar: The Battle of Argus



GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

## Skate 2

San Vanelona isn't the same place you visited in the first Skate. With improved level design and the freedom to drag environmental objects to setup whatever obstacles you want, Skate 2 opens up a new world to players. New tricks and a brilliant online portion also help make this title a tour de force. Whether you hit the asphalt with your wheels or your face, just go for it!

Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

| | |
|---|---|
| **10** | Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed. |
| **9** | Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition. |
| **8** | Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so. |
| **7** | Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end. |
| **6** | Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience. |
| **5** | Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience. |
| **4** | Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole. |
| **3** | Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme. |
| **2** | Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all. |
| **1** | Shark Surfing. You'd think it would be a good idea, but… |

**> Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

**> Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

**> Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

**> Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

**> Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

**> Replay Value**

**High** – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

**Moderately High** – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

**Moderate** – Good for a few months or a few times through.

**Moderately Low** – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

**Low** – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

PSP



Star Ocean: Second Evolution

DS



Big Bang Mini

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Age of Empires: Mythologies

pg. 87




GAME INFORMER HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH

# Retro Game Challenge

You've been transported into the 1980s by a crazed gamer, and the only way back home is to tackle the NES-inspired classics with which he challenges you. Filled with amusing nods to growing up in the first generation of video game fandom, Retro Game Challenge is a nostalgic throwback to a simpler time of cartridges, extra men, and 8-bit graphics.

## theedge

*Where All Games Aren't Created Equal*

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

| | |
|---|---|
| EARLY CHILDHOOD | Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older |
| EVERYONE | Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older. |
| EVERYONE 10+ | Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older |
| TEEN | Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older. |
| MATURE | Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older. |
| ADULTS ONLY | Content suitable only for adults. |
| RATING PENDING | Product is awaiting final rating. |

**For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).**

**1080i –** A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced

**1080p –** Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format

**480p –** Progressive scanning, this option ("p"=progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i ("i" = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting

**720p –** A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format

**4X –** A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. The abbreviation means "explore, expand, exploit, exterminate"

**action –** A term we use for games like God of War and Devil May Cry

**ad hoc –** A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity

**AI –** Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies

**adventure –** A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island

**bloom –** An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces

**board –** A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party

**cel shading –** A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels

**CG –** Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics

**DLC –** Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games

**E3 –** Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry

**first-party –** A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system

**fighting –** A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive

**FPS –** First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "frames per second," or how many animation frames happen in one second

**framerate –** The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement

**frontend –** A game's menus and options

**HDTV –** High Definition Television

**HP –** Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs

**infrastructure –** A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances

**IP –** Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within

**isometric –** Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

**jaggies –** Graphical lines that look jagged when they should be straight

**LAN –** Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay

**MMO –** Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft

**motion blur –** Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed

**music –** A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band

**NPC –** Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans

**particle effects –** Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time

**platform –** A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank

**pop-up –** When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance

**PS2 –** Sony PlayStation 2

**PS3 –** Sony's PlayStation 3 console

**puzzle –** A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross

**racing –** A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart

**RPG –** Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls

**RTS –** Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer

**shooter –** A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

**sports –** A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin

**strategy –** A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem

**third-party –** Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer

**those cuffs –** You can't break them




New San Vanelona is the ultimate skate park

PLAYSTATION 3 | XB

# Skate 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** BLACK BOX > **RELEASE** JANUARY 23 > **ESRB** T

## A SEQUEL OF A DIFFERENT CALIBER

To measure Skate's success, don't look at sales numbers, aggregate review scores, or consumer feedback. Simply turn your gaze toward the downtrodden Tony Hawk franchise. After an impressive nine game run of million-plus sellers, all it took was one game of Skate to make the Tony Hawk franchise raise a white flag and retreat into development to find a new way to compete.

Skate's focus on realism won over gamers and skaters alike. Tony Hawk's "you can grind a rollercoaster for an hour" approach was dwarfed by Skate's ability to make every kickflip and 5-0 grind feel like a praiseworthy accomplishment. But in harnessing the true essence of skating, has this series backed itself into a corner for sequels? Has Skate tricked itself into a state of repetition?

As the Tony Hawk series progressed throughout the years, Neversoft found new ways to extend the length of a run, be it with a revert, manual, or offboard sprint. None of Skate 2's new content alters the core skating experience. You can dazzle judges by throwing in an unexpected handplant or one-foot, but there isn't anything in this game that will make you say, "after playing this, there's no way I can go back and play the first game again."

Even though the skating feels like a well-worn pair of Vans, Skate 2 still finds ways to be nearly twice the game it once was. The design of city New San Vanelona is the skateboarding equivalent of a million dollar shopping spree in a candy shop. This city may be crowded by businesses and homes, but make no mistake; it's the most impressive skate park to ever be in a video game. As you look across this amazing construct, you can't help but plot your next few hours, which will likely be spent tricking out in free skate until you have a hand-cramp or an astonishing video you want to share with a friend.

If you don't spend your entire time free skating (which you could conceivably do), New San Vanelona's architecture is tapped to put a breath stealing "wow" into most of the challenges. From the high-flying scoring challenges to the bone-breaking races, I often found myself putting my progress on hold just to repeat an amazing challenge. The structure of how goals are doled out is also more accommodating to the player, allowing you to avoid unfavorable events and stick with the string you like, bouncing from race to race, or tranny competition to tranny competition.

Many of the single-player events are available for online competitions, but don't be surprised if your friends favor the new Burnout Paradise-like cooperative challenges instead. In these events, one player sets a goal, and it's up to the team to complete it, whether it's reaching a score or a nailing a specific number of difficult spot tricks. The online gameplay is just as meaty as the single player offering, giving players plenty of reason to keep this game spinning in their consoles.



Bail on a big trick and your injuries will be entered into the Hall of Meat

As rewarding as this game is, it hands out a fair share of aggravating moments. Every car doubles as the car from *Christine*, looking for the chance to splatter you on the asphalt. Pedestrians are aware of you now, and will jump out of your way more often, but they still get in your way, potentially killing a video-worthy moment. While these elements need to be addressed more than they have, the biggest killer in this game is the respawn system. After a huge bail, you could find yourself respawning at the base of a hill, in a wedge, or on the top of an awning that will make you bail when you drop. The logic behind this is that in the fairness of realism you can use the new walk maneuver to get yourself back to where you need to be. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case, and you are forced to restart the event.

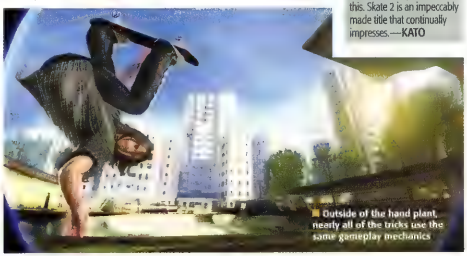
The new walk maneuver isn't wasted, however. Being able to walk upstairs and hop over ledges removes some of the frustration associated with the lay of the land.

Given how enticing the city of New San Vanelona is from the outset, I rarely used the new ability of moving objects to create custom lines. The functionality behind this is fantastic, but I really couldn't find a way to improve upon what was already there. Most of the spots I created were of the ridiculous variety – which makes for great videos, but poor challenges. I guess EA just has to learn how to make crappier levels.

Even with much of the gameplay remaining the same, Skate 2 is one of the most impressive sequels I've played in my tenure as a game critic. Most developers follow the line of thought of "more equals better." In Skate 2 better is achieved by just making it better. It does the almost impossible task of making old gameplay feel new again. —**REINER**



The replay editor is much deeper, allowing you to set up a tripod wherever you want



Outside of the hand plant, nearly all of the tricks use the same gameplay mechanics

**BOTTOM LINE 9**

> **Concept:** Skate's realistic gameplay remains mostly the same, but is heightened dramatically by the world and accompanying challenge designs

> **Graphics:** New San Vanelona is more colorful in its second life. The character details are also enhanced with gnarly zombie-like scabs, scrapes, and cuts

> **Sound:** The soundtrack (especially for the races) is forgettable. The voice acting, while loaded with "dudes" and "yos" is scripted naturally

> **Playability:** The new move set gives you more to play with, and the fantastic controls haven't changed. The new running and bail moves come in handy

> **Entertainment:** Online and off, Skate 2 is a study in level and challenge design. Sequels are rarely this true to the original source

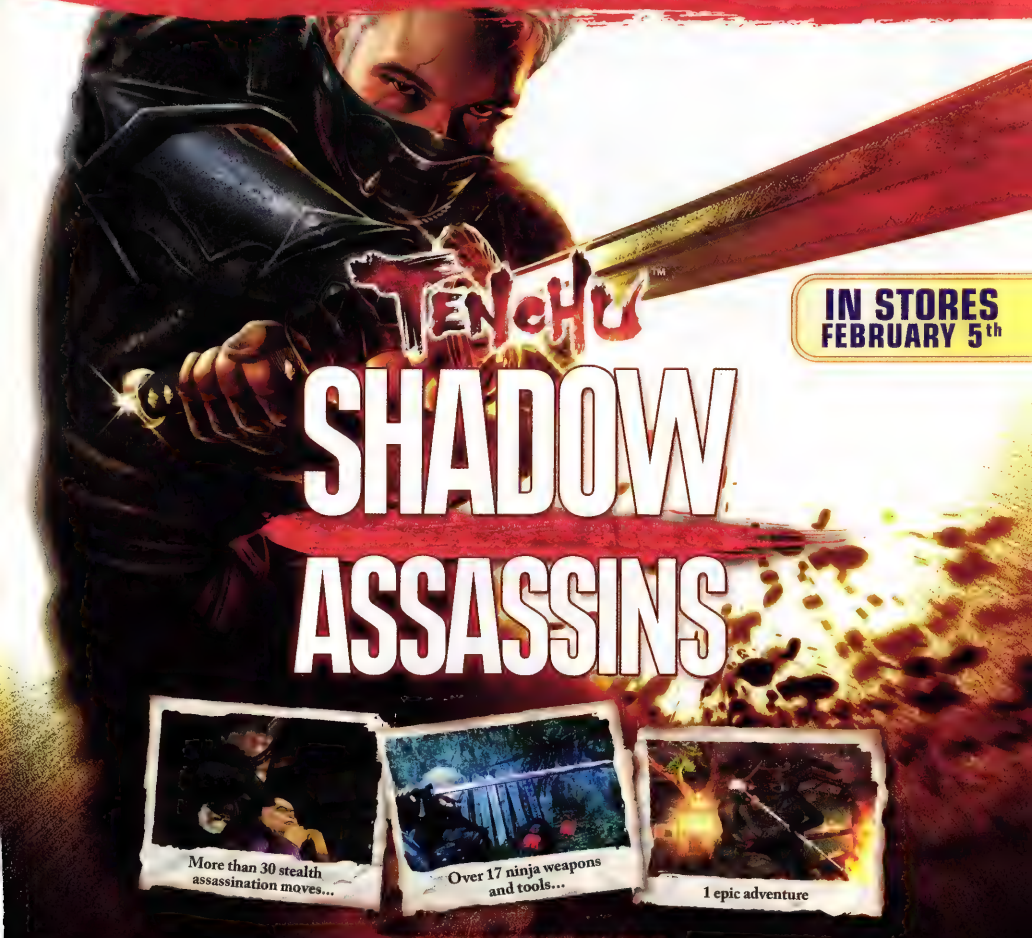
> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 9**

You can play hours of this game and never try one career challenge. The feeling of freedom to ride your own line and create your own adventure is what I love about this franchise. Combine the ability to drag objects to create your own impromptu skate park with the already stellar level design, and you start thinking like a skater – manipulating and taking advantage of your environment to turn the impossible into the astounding. However, some unresolved issues temper the true open world experience. I'm shocked that you can still run into pedestrians in this game after the problems in the first Skate, and those moments when you unexpectedly biff or even complete a challenge in spite of yourself remain. As much as there is to do in this game, I miss the spontaneous score-based filming sessions from the original Skate. They encouraged the creativity and daredevil attitude that most of this game's more discrete challenges lack. At least the great online mode makes up for some of this. Skate 2 is an impeccably made title that continually impresses. —**KATO**

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MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Suggestive Themes
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Wii

UBISOFT

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For some reason, Medusa is the only boss your allies help with. They just kind of disappear during other major battles

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

# Rise of the Argonauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 16 > **ESRB** M

## WILL NO ONE OPPOSE ME?

It's easy to understand why Greek myths have been retold and reinterpreted for centuries. They are full of improbable feats, fickle deities, and epic confrontations – qualities that form the core of a great story. Unfortunately, the heroic spirit that drives classic mythology is utterly absent from Rise of the Argonauts. This version of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece is more like a Sisyphean trial, demanding patience and sacrifice from any poor soul who plays it.

Equipped with a sword, spear, mace, and giant shield, Jason looks like a battle-hardened warrior. That may lead you to think that combat is a central component of the game, but don't be fooled: You're lucky if you have more than a few fights per hour. Most of the time, Jason is hoofing it from one end of a city to the other to deliver a message, talking to a guard captain, or performing other ridiculous errands that don't involve fighting at all. You don't feel like a part of an epic journey when you're hunting for a mead-maker because you accepted a quest from some drunk guy.

Once you clear out the enemies in your initial sweep of a new area, nothing stands in your way as you repeatedly trek back and forth across the maps. Not only is that boring, it also makes the world feel completely bloated, since your battles and interactions are so sparse compared to the amount of time you spend in transit. It feels like huge chunks of the game were just removed, with nothing left behind to take their place. Liquid Entertainment should have found a way to integrate combat better, because I could glimpse the potential for a fun game in the slivers of battle.

With three weapons, two AI-controlled companions, and a variety of unique skills, fighting in Rise of the Argonauts can be fun. Cool finishing moves, magic spells, and the ability to switch weapons mid-combo add some flexibility, but you are never required to learn the mechanics. Button mashing will work most of the time since the incredibly slim array of enemy types doesn't make you strategize or vary your tactics. The rarity of combat also makes it difficult to get acclimated; you only hit a regular flow of enemies in the game's final chapters, and Jason is pretty tough by then. It would have been nice to get a better sense of progression, but that's something the sporadic encounters can't provide.

As if the design weren't already a problem, a heap of technical issues also present obstacles on the Argonauts' journey. Frequent framerate hiccups, a bad camera, and even a couple of crashes contribute to the overall lack of polish. Those elements can be overlooked when the game is at its best – but even in the rare instances where everything clicks, Rise of the Argonauts is an average action game. The rest of the time, you'll wish you could take a swim in the River Styx rather than set sail on this dull, plodding sea.—**JOE**



With its three consecutive battles, the arena has some the most concentrated combat in the entire game



Jason's execution moves are accompanied by a slo-mo effect



Tartarus is one of only six areas you'll visit

**BOTTOM LINE 6**

> **Concept:** Take Greek mythology and fill it with boring fetch quests and infrequent battles

> **Graphics:** Solid art direction with shoddy implementation Environments and (most) character models do not look good

> **Sound:** The best part of the whole game. There are a lot of repeating tracks, but at least they evoke the right mood

> **Playability:** The map and objectives screen is buried way too deep considering how much time you spend wandering around

> **Entertainment:** Unless you really love watching running animations, you won't find anything fun here

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion 6.75**

In ancient Greek society, verbal storytelling was an important part of everyday life, essential for everything from religious practices and historical documentation to entertainment. I suppose it's fitting then that a game based on Greek myth would be so dialogue heavy. The action isn't bad, it's just unrefined and easy to exploit. Maybe if Rise of the Argonauts had been more cinematic it could have gotten away with this dialogue-focused gameplay, but while the story and voice acting are generally good, the animation and camera work are mesmerizingly stiff. There are a host of other flaws such as the poor map system, frequent loads, and annoying amount of backtracking. You can tell the developers had a lot more planned for this game, and what's worse, you can see how much potential the game has. Too bad it's unfulfilled.—**BEN**




PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

# MLB Front Office Manager

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** BLUE CASTLE GAMES > **RELEASE** JANUARY 26 > **ESRB** E

## WORSE THAN THE PIRATES

Only 2K Sports and Major League Baseball know if this low-budget wreck of a game was shoved out the door to meet contractual requirements or if it is the result of more mundane failures in the development process. Either way, as far as players are concerned, there's little here to love.

If anyone should like this game, it's me. I knew what the super-2 arbitration exception was going in, and I can quote the rules for draft pick compensation for free agent losses by heart. However, this title fails in every meaningful way outside of faithfully recreating MLB rules regarding player salaries and offseason events like the Rule 5 draft.

Most importantly, the menu system – which is the only way you interact with the game – sucks. The only marginally useful way to sort through groups of players is via their overall rating, and you're forced into cumbersomely diving through additional menu layers to see potential ability, contract status, or league experience – vital information when judging a player's worth to your club. The vast depth involved in running a big league organization is inaccessible, since it's such a nightmare to evaluate free agents, rival talent, and your own positional depth beyond the major league roster.

The nuts and bolts of gameplay are apocalyptic failures, but the awfulness doesn't stop there. Managing games is utterly pointless. There is no negotiation beyond "yes/no" with players for contracts or rival GM's with trades. The animations are laughably terrible last-gen quality. The litany of missteps here is epic. Even gamers who buy the *Bill James Handbook* every year should stay away from this turd.—**ADAM**




**BOTTOM LINE 3**

> **Concept:** Give players the chance to step into a GM's boring, stinky shoes

> **Graphics:** I guess the fonts in the menus that you stare at for 90 percent of gameplay are fine?

> **Sound:** There's not even the traditional sports game licensed soundtrack here, just generic background noise

> **Playability:** For a game based on menus, you'd think that the developer would spend some time making them useable. Not this time, sucker

> **Entertainment:** I say with no trace of hyperbole that the old unlicensed Dynamix Front Page Sports titles from the early '90s are far, far better than this

> **Replay Value:** Low

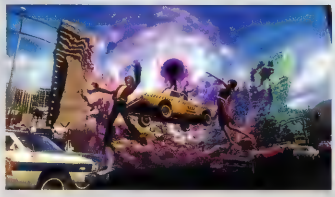
**Second Opinion 5**

In MLB Front Office Manager, the biggest challenge awaiting upstart general managers isn't a four-team trade, or contract negotiations with a greedy player who wants to buy an Escalade for his 20 soon-to-be-born children. The hardest part is figuring out how to successfully navigate the menus. With little in terms of sorting options and roster organizing leeway, putting together a 40-man team ends up being a hair-pulling nightmare. For a game that should test your wheeling and dealing mettle, the idiotic general manager AI proved to be far too easy to fool – even from the outset when your general manager's level is low. Peavy for Marquis and Pie? You got it, moron. The simulations move quickly, but the CPU auto-correct function just makes a mess of things. There's little in terms of strategic depth, less in terms of interaction, and practically nothing here that you can't do in other baseball game franchise modes. Avoid it like you would a trade for Barry Zito.—**REINER**

XBOX 360

# Destroy All Humans!: Path of the Furon

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** SANDBLAST GAMES
> **RELEASE** DECEMBER 1 > **ESRB** T



**BOTTOM LINE 4.5**

> **Concept:** Take Destroy All Humans' dated gameplay design into the 1970s

> **Graphics:** This puts a rest to the notion that all games using Unreal technology look good. The pop-up and texture resolution problems are criminal

> **Sound:** The kitschy music is passable, but the grating voiceovers and celebrity impressions wouldn't pass muster at a comedy club's open mic night

> **Playability:** The flying saucer combat is enjoyable, but the frustrating on-foot combat is hampered by the poor weapon selection

> **Entertainment:** Clikchy and unfunny, this is one of the worst sandbox games ever made

> **Replay Value:** Low

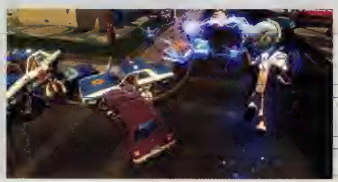
## DESTROY ALL FUN

The sad decline of the Destroy All Humans franchise is a minor tragedy, because the core idea here is fantastic. I would love a freewheeling, over-the-top sci-fi take on the sandbox genre. Path of the Furon is intended to be a funny, campy take on the genre not bogged down by realism. However, the sad truth is this game is neither funny nor fun. It's a tepid mix of bad dialogue, clichéd and outdated cultural references, tedious gameplay, and numerous bugs and collision errors. Still interested? Let me continue.

The game takes hero Crypto into the '70s and to a globe-trotting assortment of fake cities based on locales like Las Vegas, Shanghai, and Paris. Each environment is painfully small and lifeless; it's possible to run across the entire city in less than five minutes. I don't understand why the developers didn't spend time creating one city that was actually interesting as opposed to a bunch of drab ones.

The gameplay revolves around a typical mission structure: go here, talk to someone, and then blow stuff up. While Crypto's powers – which include body snatching, mind reading, and telekinesis – sound great on paper, many of them aren't very useful. This leaves you with only your trusty Zap-o-matic to take down foes, which is extremely frustrating when you're facing multiple enemies. The flying saucer combat is better, but since you can only land it at prescribed points, it's essentially worthless as a means of transport. In fairness, it does give you a great view of all the pop-up and jumpy textures.

While the basic design seems mediocre and behind-the-times, the writing and total lack of polish makes this game truly terrible. Bad Jack Nicholson impressions, dated Sonny and Cher references – it's got it all. In the faux-China level, you're searching for a character named "Rolo," who the characters keep referring to as "Ro-ro." Get it? Chinese people can't pronounce their "l"s" right! Isn't that hilarious? And by "hilarious," I mean "stupid and racist." If that tickles your funny bone, wait until you have to restart the game and lose your progress because you got stuck on a wall due to one of the innumerable collision bugs. I swear, you'll laugh until you cry. Or just skip right to the crying part.—**MATT**



**Second Opinion 3**

Buildings are phasing in and out of reality! People are magically floating across the streets! Cars are melding with fences! Is this the handiwork of an alien hellbent on destroying the human race? I wish it were. These anomalies are produced by a game that can't handle its own action. For every abducted human, you're bound to see dozens of others magically appear, float without animation, then vanish. These game-breaking graphical miscues are only a small piece of Path of the Furon's loathsome content. Your day can also be ruined by the broken targeting system, pointless conversation trees, enemies that spawn behind you as soon as you turn around, inconsistent framerates, humorless jokes with shades of racism, awful flying saucers races, uninspired fetch missions, and to top it off, game breaking bugs like Crypto getting stuck on geometry. Destroy All Humans has fallen harder and faster than any franchise I've seen, leaving behind nothing but a poorly rendered alien that needs to be dissected and put togethes in a new way.—**REINER**

Wii

# Rygar: The Battle of Argus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** TECMO
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 3 > **ESRB** T

## FLOPPY DISK

The Wii seems to be the system of choice if you want to play older games. It has a wealth of downloadable classics on Virtual Console, you can play the entire library of GameCube titles, and now it's even getting ports of PS2 games, like this 2002 Greco-Roman action title. Unlike the Nintendo classics, however, this mythological adventure doesn't hold up under the destructive weight of time.

A lot has happened since Rygar appeared on PS2. The action adventure genre has evolved to some epic cinematic heights, and all Rygar has done is grow out his spiky hair and gotten a few tattoos. Where it counts, he's still the same simplistic button jockey. Even when it first came out, Rygar was only on the high end of average. Rygar's slightly destructible environments were fun, but not original. Its combat was solid, but fairly basic. In this post-God of War world, Rygar's average qualities trudge ever closer to being outright failures in game design.



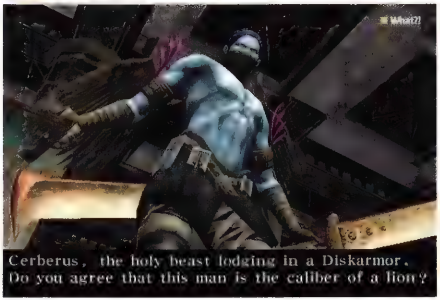
Greco-Roman mythology was never this extreme

Even after jumping to the Wii, Rygar's combat feels sluggish, hindered by the terrible auto-targeting. By the time you're well into a combo string, your opponent has often moved out of the way and started stabbing you in the back. Even Rygar's signature weapon, the Diskarmor, no longer seems original. While Rygar has great attack range, the combat lacks any flash or style.

Rygar's mediocre storyline doesn't help, either. It hardly seems epic enough to have come from the same bloodline as the ancient myths it apes. The level layouts deserve a revamp, too, as it's not always clear where you should be going next. The fixed camera hinders the action, and doesn't help the already iffy platforming. While we're talking about dated features, we should mention the game doesn't even support widescreen, instead opting to stretch out its 4:3 image to fit 16:9 displays.

The character – like the game's subtitle – has changed, but neither are for the better. In fact, there is no reason to choose this game over the now cheaper PS2 version. Sure, the game features a few new enemies and a new gladiator mode that has you racking up a high score in area challenges using the Wii's motion controls, but both are easy to miss if you aren't paying attention. You might have some fond memories of this series, but I suggest you avoid eye contact with this game next time you're at the store.—**BEN**


Are those pasties? What kind of game is this?






The pointless Gladiator mode in action

**BOTTOM LINE 5.5**

> **Concept:** Port an old PS2 action adventure title based off Greek myths over to the Wii with limited extras

> **Graphics:** Need proof that Wii games don't look any better than last generation games? Look no further

> **Sound:** The musical score is fairly decent, but the voice acting could use some work and a better script

> **Playability:** The game plays like a six-year-old title, and Tecmo did little to polish its dated mechanics

> **Entertainment:** The game isn't devoid of fun, but Wii owners can do better than this

> **Replay Value:** Low

### Second Opinion 5.75

I'll give the original PS2 Rygar some credit for beating Kratos to market by several years with the whole "chain blades meets Greek mythology" idea. However, God of War and several other action titles have essentially rendered the old Rygar formula obsolete. Some companies might up the ante with an all-new game, but Tecmo is content leaving the game almost exactly as-is. They simply changed the name and the look of the character (for the worse) with the obvious intention of bamboozling the average consumer into thinking this is a new game. But the fixed camera blows, the useless story features poorly voiced characters, drawn-out attack animations leave you vulnerable to attack, and platforming is imprecise to say the least. Tecmo's only addition? A survival mode that just reminds you, "Hey, we could have used motion controls and a free camera system. Look how terrible that would have been!" If you have any desire to try this game, search a bargain bin for the PS2 version and save yourself the trouble and cash.—**BRYAN**

# HANDHELD QUICKIES

## Star Ocean: Second Evolution

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE/SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** JANUARY 20 > **ESRB** T

PSP



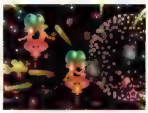
After releasing Star Ocean: First Departure only months ago, Square Enix returns to its dwindling back catalogue to reissue the second game in the Star Ocean series. Second Evolution feels like an anonymous and formulaic RPG most of the time, but extraordinary moments occasionally rise to the surface. The involved skill system provides interesting character progression, and lots of unique camera angles frame the non-action segments in cool ways. Other than that, you can expect a stable of clichés to carry you through the story and real-time combat. Despite my usual affinity for developer Tri-Ace, I wouldn't have called this game a classic when the original version released on PSone. Time hasn't changed my mind.—**JOE**

## Big Bang Mini

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** ARKEDO STUDIO > **RELEASE** JANUARY 6 > **ESRB** E

NINTENDO DS



While developers struggle to find ways to use the Wii's unique controls, the DS is home to a treasure trove of unique and interesting arcade style titles. Add Big Bang Mini to that list. Using only the stylus, you move a small globe around the bottom screen, making swiping motions to shoot at the enemies above. The simple mechanics work well, providing an ingratiating twist on the top-down shooter. While it works great for the most part, the more elaborate levels begin to overwhelm the imprecise mechanics, causing confusion and frustration. Still, it's damn fun. Be sure to check the great multiplayer mode.—**MATT**

## Iron Chef America: Supreme Cuisine

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2 PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** DESTINEER > **DEVELOPER** BLACK LANTERN > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 18 > **ESRB** E10+

NINTENDO DS



When Iron Chef first debuted on the Food Network, I remember feeling inspired to run into my kitchen and see what I could cobble together with the scraps in my refrigerator. This mishmash of minigames, however, makes me want to give up and call for a pizza. Like the show, Iron Chef tests your prowess in the kitchen by having you prepare dishes using a single special ingredient. But once you get in the kitchen, you find that the gameplay has been boiled down more than a reduction of chicken stock. Tap the screen to chop celery. Slide the stylus sideways to grate cheese. Trace the lines to fillet a fish. The game is boring, but even more problematic is its occasional trouble recognizing simple actions. If you're looking for a cool little collection of real recipes, that isn't here. If you're looking for a fun collection of minigames, that also isn't here.—**BEN**

## Prince of Persia: The Fallen King

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT CASABLANCA > **RELEASE** DECEMBER 2 > **ESRB** E

NINTENDO DS



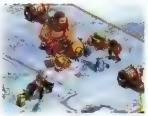
If you ever wondered how the Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass touch controls would work on a side-scrolling platformer, this is your chance to find out. At its best, you navigate a series of death-defying jumps and wall climbs with a few simple taps. At its worst, you fall instantly to your death. The latter will happen several times a stage and feels oh so cheap. Combat is stale and repetitive outside of boss battles, and several stages are filled with copy and pasted sections and artificially lengthening collect-three-gems-to-open-door setups. Corruption powers earned throughout the game add further layers of challenge and entertainment, but only dedicated PoP fans will put up with The Fallen King's faults to find its few shining moments.—**BRYAN**

## Age of Empires: Mythologies

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS/GRIPTONITE GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 24 > **ESRB** E10+

NINTENDO DS



Age of Empires smoothly transitions from a real-time strategy PC game to a turn-based tactics handheld game. Mythologies preserves the foundation of its PC forefather — players build towns, gather resources, and recruit soldiers and mythic creatures like minotaurs and sphinx to crush their enemies. Each playable race — the Egyptians, Greeks, and Norse — features varied units with unique strategic advantages, including clever god-granted bonuses that can sway the tide of the battle. With three single-player campaigns and online multiplayer, Mythologies offers tactics fans several hours of rewarding gameplay. The game's unique rewards system with unlockable maps, heroes, and relic powers adds replay value to a solid, if not earth-shattering, strategy title.—**BERTZ**

## The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity

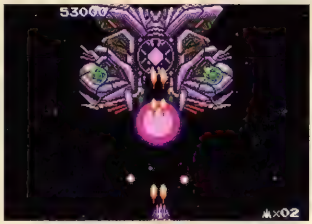
BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** RAZORBACK DEVELOPMENTS > **RELEASE** JANUARY 27 > **ESRB** E

NINTENDO DS



I love myself some 2D platforming action, but The Chase has enough problems to keep it out of my DS. The gameplay is an odd riff on Kirby Canvas Curse; your character is always moving, trying to outrun the coming storm. You can switch directions, jump, slide, and draw lines for them to run along with the stylus as you try to avoid enemies and collect goodies. However, your attention is constantly split between the radar on the upper screen and the zoomed-in view of the action below, making the fast-paced gameplay difficult to keep up with. Art that fails to distinguish between moving yet non-interactive backgrounds and gameplay elements is a problem as well in this otherwise tightly tuned action/platformer.—**ADAM**




NINTENDO DS

## Retro Game Challenge

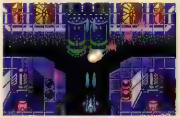
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** XSEED GAMES > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10 > **ESRB** E

### OLD-SCHOOL ACTION

Retro Game Challenge is a gooey love letter to the NES era, giving nostalgia junkies and fans of classic gameplay plenty to chew on. Based on the Japanese TV show Retro Game Master, players tackle challenges in a variety of fictitious NES games covering several genres. One minute you might have to score 200,000 points in a Galaga clone, the next you're tasked with finishing in the top five in a racing game—there's even an RPG to slog through. Each of the games is rendered with blocky sprites and accompanied with a symphony of bloops and beeps.

Between challenges you can read fake magazines for editorials, codes for making challenges easier, and previews of upcoming games. There's a neat sense of progression between those games, with sequels adding features, graphical upgrades, and everything else you'd expect in real life. Robot Ninja Haggle Man in particular goes from a relatively simple "slam the doors on the bad guys" kind of affair to an item-filled action game during its three iterations.

Once you beat all the challenges on a given game, it's unlocked, allowing you to play it whenever you like. The games are definitely infused with tons of retro appeal, but more importantly they're fun to play on their own merits. Even if you're not old enough to remember blowing on carts, Retro Game Challenge is interesting and varied enough to entertain for hours.—**JEFF**






BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Play a bunch of retro-inspired games while meeting specific challenges

> **Graphics:** Chunky, blocky, and primitive. In other words, perfect for the game

> **Sound:** Just like the graphics, they're dated, from the funky songs to the era-appropriate effects

> **Playability:** You'll look forward to unlocking free play on some of the games, they're so good

> **Entertainment:** Adding specific tasks pumps even more life into the already addicting action

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

### Second Opinion 7.75

"Retro Game Challenge finds you sprawled out in front of the TV popping in one cartridge after another to challenge high scores. You've been sent into the past by a game player disillusioned with modern titles, and only by meeting his challenges can you return home. Each of the short, old school games are clearly modeled after old favorites, and constant in-jokes serve as reminders of a childhood spent in front of early interactive gems. The games, which run the gamut from role-playing titles to racers, are amusing for a while. Unfortunately, their simple premises wear thin over time since so many of them require repeated restarts before each challenge. The concept is extremely clever. The gameplay itself is exactly what it is meant to be – 25 years behind the times.—**MILLER**

# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

**Listings Based Upon NPD Data For November 2008 Based On Units Sold**

### 1 GEARS OF WAR 2 (360)



HeartDonor360 – Games need love too, and after a long day on the battlefield I'm looking to curl up under the covers with something that doesn't have a barrel. I like movies and music, and I'm the best singer in my squad. Please call! I'm tired of shopping the Damaged Goods department, and I'm willing to lie about how we met!

### 2 CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR (360)



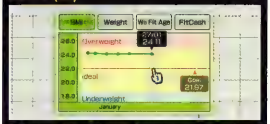
CatHater2 – Single German Male looking for that special someone to feed and bathe me. I love long walks in the woods, and enjoy hunting, camping, and fishing trips. I whine a lot, but I'm super loyal, and really good at snapping necks during a wartime skirmish. If you're looking for a new companion please call 1-800-875-HUME (The American Humane Society).

### 3 Wii PLAY (Wii)



IFartAlot – Like Forest Gump said, "I'm stupid." But, since light travels faster than sound, I appear bright until I speak. I think that, like coffee and chocolate, a lover is better when he's rich. Well, guess what? I'm loaded. I got into the business of selling useless goods and it's been good to me. If you're looking for a man with a large bulge…in his back right pocket, look no further.

### 4 Wii FIT (Wii)




EvilPrincess – I'm tired of constantly moving around and conforming to the whims of other people. I feel like I'm constantly playing a balancing act, and I'm tired and ready to settle. Like poop, the older I've gotten, the easier I am to pick up. I just want someone who will treat me like a phone – hold me close and talk to me, but not press all my buttons and turn me off.

### 5 MARIO KART Wii (Wii)



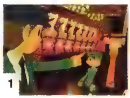
RenaissanceMan4Life – Some say I live in my own fantasy world, so don't expect me to always be mentally present. But if you believe in dragons, flying turtles, good men, and other fantasy creatures maybe we'll work out. I'm tired of chasing my princess and I'm ready for the three-ring circus: engagement ring, wedding ring, and suffering.

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System | Score | Release |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gears of War 2 | N/A | 360 | 9 | 11-08 |
| 2 | Call of Duty: World at War | N/A | 360 | 8.75 | 11-08 |
| 3 | Wii Play | 5 | Wii | 7 | 02-07 |
| 4 | Wii Fit | 2 | Wii | 8 | 04-08 |
| 5 | Mario Kart Wii | 4 | Wii | 8.5 | 04-08 |
| 6 | Call of Duty: World at War | N/A | PS3 | 8.75 | 11-08 |
| 7 | Guitar Hero World Tour | 12 | Wii | N/A | 10-08 |
| 8 | Left 4 Dead | N/A | 360 | 9.25 | 11-08 |
| 9 | Resistance 2 | N/A | PS3 | 8.5 | 11-08 |
| 10 | Wii Music | N/A | Wii | 3 | 10-08 |
| 11 | Animal Crossing: City Folk | N/A | Wii | 7.5 | 11-08 |
| 12 | Fallout 3 | 3 | 360 | 9.5 | 10-08 |
| 13 | Rock Band | N/A | Wii | N/A | 06-08 |
| 14 | Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Alma | N/A | DS | N/A | 11-08 |
| 15 | Guitar Hero World Tour | 11 | 360 | 9.25 | 10-08 |
| 16 | Mario Kart DS | N/A | DS | 8.5 | 11-05 |
| 17 | Guitar Hero World Tour | N/A | PS2 | N/A | 10-08 |
| 18 | WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 | N/A | PS2 | 8.5 | 11-08 |
| 19 | Fable II | 1 | 360 | 9.25 | 10-08 |
| 20 | Madden NFL 2009 | N/A | 360 | 8.25 | 08-08 |

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/VRSTS™

## TOP 10 JAPAN

| Rank | Title | System |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Professor Layton and the Last Journey | DS |
| 2 | Dragon Ball Z Infinite World | PS2 |
| 3 | Animal Crossing: City Folk | Wii |
| 4 | Kirby Super Star Ultra | DS |
| 5 | Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 | PS3 |
| 6 | My Fashion Girls' Mode | DS |
| 7 | Pokémon Platinum | DS |
| 8 | 428: Trapped in Shibuya | Wii |
| 9 | Fallout 3 | 360 |
| 10 | Rhythm Heaven | DS |



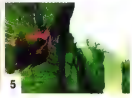




## TOP 10 GI

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Skate 2 | N/A | multi |
| 2 | Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix | N/A | PSN |
| 3 | Left 4 Dead | 1 | multi |
| 4 | Call of Duty: World at War | 2 | multi |
| 5 | LittleBigPlanet | 3 | PS3 |
| 6 | Prince of Persia | 7 | multi |
| 7 | Tomb Raider Underworld | 5 | multi |
| 8 | Guitar Hero World Tour | 6 | multi |
| 9 | Fallout 3 | 4 | multi |
| 10 | Puzzle Quest: Galactrix | N/A | XBLA |

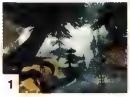


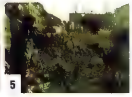




The Staff's Favorite Picks

## TOP 10 PC

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King | N/A | $36 |
| 2 | World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King Collector's Edition | N/A | $70 |
| 3 | Call Of Duty: World at War | N/A | $50 |
| 4 | Spore | 2 | $48 |
| 5 | Fallout 3 | 1 | $49 |
| 6 | World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest | 6 | $34 |
| 7 | The Sims 2 Double Deluxe | 9 | $19 |
| 8 | Left 4 Dead | N/A | $48 |
| 9 | The Sims 2 Apartment Life | 7 | $21 |
| 10 | Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 | 10 | $49 |




Based On Monthly Units Sold

# REVIEWSARCHIVE

## PLAYSTATION 3

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Alone in the Dark: Inferno | 7.25 | Jan-09 |
| Armored Core: For Answer | 6.25 | Dec-08 |
| Baja: Edge of Control | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Battle Fantasia | 7.5 | Oct-08 |
| BioShock | 9 | Nov-08 |
| Blitz: The League II | 7 | Nov-08 |
| Bourne Conspiracy, The | 6.75 | Aug-08 |
| Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway | 7.75 | Nov-08 |
| Buzz Quiz TV | 8.25 | Nov-08 |
| Call of Duty: World at War | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Dead Space | 9.25 | Nov-08 |
| Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice | 8.25 | Sep-08 |
| FaceBreaker | 7.75 | Oct-08 |
| Fallout 3 | 9.5 | Dec-08 |
| Far Cry 2 | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli | 7.75 | Nov-08 |



Call of Duty: World at War – PlayStation 3 – Jan-09

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| FIFA Soccer 09 | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Fracture | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| Golden Axe: Beast Rider | 6 | Dec-08 |
| Guitar Hero World Tour | 9.25 | Dec-08 |
| Guitar Hero: Aerosmith | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Incredible Hulk, The | 6.75 | Aug-08 |
| Kung Fu Panda | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The | 4 | Jan-09 |
| Legendary | 6.5 | Jan-09 |
| LEGO Batman | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| LittleBigPlanet | 9.5 | Dec-08 |
| Madden NFL 09 | 8.25 | Sep-08 |
| Mercenaries 2: World in Flames | 7.25 | Oct-08 |
| Midnight Club: Los Angeles | 9 | Nov-08 |
| Mirror's Edge | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Monster Madness: Grave Danger | 7.25 | Aug-08 |
| Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| MotorStorm Pacific Rift | 7.25 | Dec-08 |
| NBA 09: The Inside | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| NBA 2K9 | 8.5 | Nov-08 |
| NBA Live 09 | 7.75 | Nov-08 |
| NCAA Basketball 09 | 7.25 | Jan-09 |
| NCAA Football 09 | 8.75 | Aug-08 |
| Need for Speed: Undercover | 7 | Dec-08 |
| NFL Head Coach 09 | 6.75 | Sep-08 |
| NHL 09 | 9.25 | Oct-08 |
| NHL 2K9 | 6.75 | Oct-08 |
| Prince of Persia | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 | 8.5 | Jan-09 |
| Pure | 8.5 | Oct-08 |
| Quantum of Solace | 6.5 | Jan 09 |
| Resistance 2 | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| Rock Revolution | 7 | Dec-08 |
| Saints Row 2 | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Shaun White Snowboarding | 6.75 | Jan 09 |
| Silent Hill: Homecoming | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| SingStar | 8 | Aug-08 |
| SOCOM: Confrontation | 6 | Dec-08 |
| Sonic Unleashed | 6 | Jan-09 |
| Soulcalibur IV | 8.75 | Sep-08 |
| Spider-Man: Web of Shadows | 6 | Dec 08 |
| Star Wars: The Force Unleashed | 8.75 | Oct-08 |
| Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 | 8.5 | Oct-08 |
| TNA Impact | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Tomb Raider Underworld | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Top Spin 3 | 7.75 | Aug-08 |
| Valkyria Chronicles | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| Wall-E | 4 | Sep-08 |
| WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 | 8.5 | Dec-08 |

## XBOX 360

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Alone in the Dark | 6.5 | Aug-08 |
| Armored Core: For Answer | 6.25 | Dec-08 |
| Baja: Edge of Control | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| Battle Fantasia | 7.5 | Oct-08 |
| Blitz: The League II | 7 | Nov-08 |
| Bourne Conspiracy, The | 6.75 | Aug-08 |
| Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway | 7.75 | Nov-08 |
| Call of Duty: World at War | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath | 7.25 | Aug-08 |
| Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Crash: Mind Over Mutant | 4.75 | Dec-08 |
| Dead Space | 9.25 | Nov-08 |
| Don King Presents: Prizefighter | 7.5 | Aug-08 |
| EndWar | 7.75 | Dec-08 |
| Fable II | 9.25 | Dec-08 |
| FaceBreaker | 7.75 | Oct-08 |
| Fallout 3 | 9.5 | Dec-08 |
| Far Cry 2 | 8 | Dec-08 |
| FIFA Soccer 09 | 8 | Dec 08 |
| Fracture | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| Gears of War 2 | 9 | Dec-08 |
| Golden Axe: Beast Rider | 6 | Dec-08 |
| Grid | 9 | Jul-08 |
| Guilty Gear 2: Overture | 6.25 | Oct-08 |
| Guitar Hero World Tour | 9.25 | Dec-08 |
| Guitar Hero: Aerosmith | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Incredible Hulk, The | 6.75 | Aug-08 |
| Infinite Undiscovery | 8 | Oct-08 |
| Kung Fu Panda | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Last Remnant, The | 7 | Dec-08 |
| Left 4 Dead | 9.25 | Jan-09 |
| Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The | 4 | Jan-09 |
| Legendary | 6.5 | Jan-09 |
| LEGO Batman | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| Lips | 7.5 | Jan-09 |
| Madden NFL 09 | 8.25 | Sep-08 |
| Mercenaries 2: World in Flames | 7.25 | Oct-08 |
| Midnight Club: Los Angeles | 9 | Nov-08 |
| Mirror's Edge | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| Naruto: The Broken Bond | 8.25 | Jan-09 |
| NBA 2K9 | 8.5 | Nov-08 |
| NBA Live 09 | 7.75 | Nov-08 |
| NCAA Basketball 09 | 7.25 | Jan-09 |
| NCAA Football 09 | 8.25 | Aug-08 |
| Need for Speed: Undercover | 7 | Dec-08 |
| NFL Head Coach 09 | 6.75 | Sep-08 |
| NHL 09 | 9.25 | Oct-08 |
| Prince of Persia | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 | 8.5 | Jan-09 |
| Pure | 8.5 | Oct-08 |
| Quantum of Solace | 6.5 | Jan 09 |
| Rock Revolution | 7 | Dec-08 |
| Saints Row 2 | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Scene It? Box Office Smash | 8.5 | Jan-09 |
| Shaun White Snowboarding | 6.75 | Jan 09 |
| Silent Hill: Homecoming | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Sonic Unleashed | 6 | Jan-09 |
| Soulcalibur IV | 8.75 | Sep-08 |
| Spider-Man: Web of Shadows | 6 | Dec-08 |



Left 4 Dead – Xbox 360 – Jan-09

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Star Wars: The Force Unleashed | 8.75 | Oct-08 |
| Supreme Commander | 5.5 | Sep-08 |
| Tales of Vesperia | 7.25 | Oct-08 |
| Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 | 8.5 | Oct-08 |
| TNA Impact | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Tomb Raider Underworld | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Too Human | 6.75 | Sep-08 |
| Top Spin 3 | 7.75 | Aug-08 |
| Unreal Tournament 3 | 8.5 | Aug-08 |
| Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise | 8.25 | Oct-08 |
| Wall-E | 4 | Sep-08 |
| Warhammer: Mark of Chaos – Battle March | 5 | Nov-08 |
| WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 | 8.5 | Dec-08 |
| You're In The Movies | 7.25 | Jan-09 |
| Zoids Assault | 5 | Oct-08 |

## Wii

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Active Life: Outdoor Challenge | 7 | Nov-08 |
| Animal Crossing: City Folk | 7.5 | Jan-09 |
| Brothers In Arms: Double Time | 5 | Dec-08 |
| Carnival Games MiniGolf | 5 | Jan-09 |
| Castlevania: Judgment | 5 | Jan-09 |
| Cooking Mama World Kitchen | 5.5 | Jan-09 |
| Crash: Mind Over Mutant | 4.75 | Dec-08 |
| de Blob | 7.75 | Oct-08 |
| Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility | 6.75 | Oct-08 |
| Kung Fu Panda | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon, The | 4 | Jan-09 |
| LEGO Batman | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| Line Rider 2: Ubound | 6.25 | Nov-08 |
| Mario Super Sluggers | 5.5 | Oct-08 |
| Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars | 5.75 | Dec-08 |
| Order Up | 7.75 | Sep-08 |
| Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party | 7 | Jan-09 |
| Rock Band | 8.25 | Aug-08 |
| Rock Revolution | 4.75 | Nov-08 |
| Sam & Max Season One | 7 | Sep-08 |
| Samba de Amigo | 6.75 | Nov-08 |
| Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip | 6.75 | Jan-09 |
| SimCity Creator | 5 | Nov-08 |
| Skate It | 7.75 | Jan-09 |
| Sonic Unleashed | 6.5 | Jan-09 |
| Spray | 7 | Dec 08 |
| Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Lightsaber Duels | 5 | Jan-09 |
| Star Wars: The Force Unleashed | 7.75 | Oct-08 |
| Ten Pin Alley 2 | 5 | Jan-09 |
| TNA Impact | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Ultimate Band | 7.5 | Dec-08 |
| Wall-E | 4 | Sep-08 |
| Wario Land: Shake It | 6.75 | Dec-08 |
| Wii Music | 5 | Dec-08 |
| WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 | 8.5 | Dec-08 |

## PLAYSTATION 2

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories | 6.75 | Jan-09 |
| LEGO Batman | 7.5 | Nov-08 |
| Persona 4 | 8 | Jan-09 |
| TNA Impact | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Wall-E | 4 | Sep-08 |
| WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009 | 8.5 | Dec-08 |



Persona 4 – PlayStation 2 – Jan-09

## PC

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures | 8 | Aug-08 |
| Alone in the Dark | 6.5 | Aug-08 |
| Call of Duty: World at War | 8.75 | Jan-09 |
| Civilization IV: Colonization | 9 | Oct-08 |
| Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Cryss Warhead | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Legendary | 6.5 | Jan-09 |
| Mass Effect | 9.5 | Jul-08 |
| Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir | 7.5 | Jan-09 |
| S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky | 7.75 | Nov-08 |
| Sacred 2: Fallen Angel | 7 | Jan-09 |
| Saints Row 2 | 8.75 | Dec-08 |
| Silent Hill: Homecoming | 6.5 | Nov-08 |
| Space Siege | 6 | Oct-08 |
| Spore | 8.75 | Nov-08 |
| Warhammer Online: Agea of Reckoning | 8 | Dec-08 |
| Warhammer: Mark of Chaos – Battle March | 5 | Nov-08 |

## NINTENDO DS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Away: Shuffle Dungeon | 7.5 | Oct-08 |
| Bangai-O Spirits | 7.5 | Sep-08 |
| Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia | 8.25 | Nov-08 |
| Chrono Trigger | 9 | Dec-08 |
| Civilization Revolution | 8.5 | Aug-08 |
| Cradle of Rome | 6.75 | Jan-09 |
| Disgaea DS | 8 | Oct-08 |
| Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen | 7 | Oct-08 |
| Final Fantasy IV | 8.5 | Aug-08 |
| From the Abyss | 5 | Oct-08 |
| Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades | 7 | Jan-09 |
| Guitar Hero: On Tour | 7 | Sep-08 |
| Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness | 6.75 | Oct-08 |
| Kirby Super Star Ultra | 7 | Oct-08 |
| LOL | 1 | Aug-08 |
| Master of the Monster Lair | 6.25 | Nov-08 |
| Metal Slug 7 | 6.75 | Dec-08 |
| Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir | 7 | Oct-08 |
| N+ | 8.75 | Oct-08 |
| New International Track & Field | 6.25 | Oct-08 |
| Ninja Town | 9 | Dec-08 |
| Pop Cubel Street Fashion Simulation | 7.5 | Oct-08 |
| Populous DS | 7 | Dec-08 |
| Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure | 5.5 | Oct-08 |
| Robocalypse | 7 | Jan-09 |
| Rubik's Wold | 8 | Dec 08 |
| Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood | 8.5 | Nov-08 |
| Star Wars: The Clone Wars – Jedi Alliance | 6 | Jan-09 |
| Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff | 6.25 | Dec-08 |
| Time Hollow | 7 | Nov-08 |
| Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 | 8.25 | Aug-08 |

## PSP

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2 | II | Jul-08 |
| N+ | 8.75 | Oct-08 |
| R-Type Command | 7.25 | Jul-08 |
| Secret Agent Clank | 8.5 | Jul-08 |
| Space Invaders Extreme | 8.25 | Jul-08 |
| Star Ocean: First Departure | 7 | Nov-08 |





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# LittleBigPlanet

PS3

## Creating New Worlds

UNLIMITED ENABLED

*By Media Molecule*



Making your own levels is easily one of the most rewarding and fulfilling aspects to LittleBigPlanet. If you browse the user-generated content online, you'll likely come across some awe-inspiring levels. However, if you're just getting into the creation system it can be overwhelming. We've got you covered. Use these tips to save time while you're working on your own masterpiece.

**Custom Shapes** – Spent loads of time creating the perfect shape, and want to use it in the future? Simply use the Capture Object tool (found at the top of every page in the goodies bag) to save a copy of the shape to your Popit, then you can use it whenever you're in Create mode. You can even cut out shapes from other material with it. Another brilliant way of sharing shapes is to make your shapes as a "cookie cutter." Simply make a block, copy your shape (click in left analogue stick) and then use the triangle button to cut out the shape from the block. When you give this shape to players as rewards, they can use the cookie cutter to make their own shapes and also edit them (players can't edit the shape if they just get the shape). Shapes and objects make great rewards and collectables in your levels, so keep them all by using the Capture tool.

**Dark Matter** – Dark Matter (found in the goodies bag on the materials page) is extremely useful for creating floating platforms – no need to build from the ground up, Dark Matter doesn't move, ever! Just a tiny piece is enough to keep something in place. Remember that dark matter can only be moved by the power of the Popit cursor and not in Play mode. The best way to apply this is to use dark matter on a thin layer and glue it to the front or the back.

**Create an Always On Switch** – Want a joint to stay on after it has been activated? Using switches, dark matter, and dissolve material you can set up a device that does just that. Create a u-shape of dark matter and place a magnetic key switch at the bottom. Then create a block (or more depending on how many switches need to be activated) of dissolve material that sits inside the u-shape. Above the dissolve create a block that has a magnetic key attached to it (make sure it's the same color as the magnetic key switch placed earlier). Link the magnetic key switch to the joint you want to activate, and create the button/switch you want the player to activate to the block of dissolve (you need to create a new button/switch for each block of dissolve you have). Now each time the player presses one of these buttons, or activates one of the switches a block of dissolve will disappear. Eventually the magnetic key switch and magnetic key will come together (make sure the radius is set correctly so that it doesn't trigger the joint prematurely), activate and then set the joint in motion. Using the method of setting up buttons/switches to activate magnetic key switches, you can set up more advanced logic gates. See what crazy devices you can come up with.



**Improve Level Aesthetics** – New creators sometimes overlook the Material Changer (found in the Tools menu in Popit). However, it's an extremely useful tool when adding artistic touches to your level. Changing the materials in your level can lead to some interesting and artistic results, luckily the Material Changer makes this quick and simple. Just remember that different material types have different attributes. You can also use the Material Changer to make designs using the borders that some materials have. For example, create a block of Gold Metal material, then create a star shape using a different material inside that. Get out the Material Changer tool and turn the star into Gold Metal. You now have a block of Gold metal with a star outline in the middle.

**Avoid Complications** – Creating your level in small sections is the key to good level construction. There's no need to use one large piece of material for your entire level! Sometimes you have a great idea for a section of your level and once you've made half of it you suddenly receive the message, "This shape is getting too complicated. You cannot add any more to it." When this happens simply cut the block of material in half. Select a material and the square shape, scale it down really small, and then use the Cut Away function to cut the complex shape into two smaller shapes. Once done, just glue the two pieces together and carry on making your level.



**Smoke Effect** – Rockets have other uses apart from thrusting things through the LittleBigPlanet; they have a smoke trail that can be used to great artistic effect. Select a rocket (found in the Tools Bag) and attach it to a piece of dark matter (we don't want it blasting off!) and then place it into your level. Changing the boost amount changes the size of the trail, so you can decide if you want a lot of smoke or a little smoke.

**Global Controls** – Playing with the global controls (last page of the tools bag) can lead to some brilliant results. Once you've created your level, play about with the global controls to give your level a more atmospheric feel to it. Color Correction can help set the mood and tone of your level, and changing the fog color, fogginess, and darkness can lead to some interesting level settings. We particularly like to turn darkness to max and emit loads of LED light objects ... pretty!



**Give Us Your Feedback** – The most important thing about LittleBigPlanet is you! We are always listening to all feedback the community gives us, so that we can make the LittleBigPlanet an even better place to gad about. Make sure you tell us what you do and don't like about the game in the LittleBigWorkshop forums and together we can keep Sackboy smiling!

## Mod World

**THE 11TH ANNUAL INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL**
**www.igf.com**

The entrants to the 2009 IGF Main Competition have been announced, and while dozens of the 226 games are worth a look, here are a few of the free-to-play titles that caught our eye.

**DINO RUN**
www.pixeljam.com/dinorun/



Charming retro VGA-style graphics sell this fast-paced vision of a dinosaur trying to outrun the coming apocalypse. Rudimentary physics provide a compelling reason to dodge obstacles, and the timed gameplay and collectible items are perfect for high-score runs.

**CARPE UNIVERSUM**
www.wyrdysm.com/carpegame.php



This synaesthetic 2D shoot-em-up is very early along in development, but you'll have a hard time finding 20 minutes of better free gameplay. Several special attacks and a hypnotic mix of minimalist graphics and pounding techno beats make us devoutly hope this eventually becomes a full game.

**PUZZLE FARTER**
www.puzzlefart.com



At its heart it's a simplistic 2D puzzle/platformer, but the seminal audio work lifts Puzzle Farter above the rank and file. You'll dodge enemies and traps to get to the goal in each of the 50 levels and giggle the whole time – if your sense of humor is anything like ours, anyway.

## Code of the Month

# Battlefield: Bad Company



Looking for more ways to blow guys away in Bad Company's multiplayer? Check out these codes to unlock a few extra weapons. To enter these go into the multiplayer menu then select Unlocks and press start to pull up the redeem code menu. Now just enter the following codes and unlock some new guns.

**M60 Machine Gun** - try4ndrunK!rcov3r
**QBU88 Sniper Rifle** - your5mynext4rget
**USAS-12 Shotgun** - aw3some1repOwer
**Uzi** - cov3r1ngthecorn3r



**Attention All Cheaters!**

*Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.*

*On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!*

### MULTI-SYSTEM



**Need for Speed: Undercover**

Go into the options menu then choose the Secret Codes selection and you'll be able to enter the following codes. However, each code will only work once per profile.

**Earn $10,000 –** $EDSOC
**Earn $15,000 –** S1D3K1CK
**Unlock Die-Cast Lexus IS F –** 0;5M2;
**Unlock Die-Cast Nissan 240SX –** ?P:COL
**Unlock Die-Cast Volkwagen R32 –** !2ODBJ:
**Unlock NeedforSpeed.com Lotus Elise –** -KJ3=E

### MULTI-SYSTEM



**WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009**

Need some fresh meat in the ring, but don't want to make your own new wrestler? Use these codes to unlock a few new characters. To use them, go into the Options menu and select Cheat Codes.

**Boogeyman –** BoogeymanEatsWorms!!
**Chris Jericho (Classic Attire) –** AllJerichoModelSvR09
**Gene Snitsky –** UnlockSnitskySvR2009
**Hawkins & Ryder (Tag Team) –** Ryder&HawkinsTagTeam
**Jillian Hall –** PlayAsJillianHallSvR
**Layla –** UnlockECWDivaLayla09
**Ric Flair –** FlairWoooooooooooooo
**Saturday Nights Arena –** SatNightMainEventSvR
**Tazz –** UnlockECWTazzSvR2009
**Vince McMahon –** VinceMcMahonNoChance

### XBOX 360



**You're in the Movies**

Tired of the small selection of movies to play through at the start of the game? Use this code while at the title screen to unlock all the trailers as well as the Director mode.

**Unlock Everything –** LB, RB, LB, RB, Y

*"GI Droid"*

*(location unknown – Last seen handing out valentines stuffed with bees)*


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# THE LOST ACT

## ACTRAISER REVISITED

**Released shortly after the Super Nintendo's North American launch in 1991, ActRaiser was a fascinating genre mashup of action platforming and world-building simulation utilizing cutting edge Mode 7 effects and a sophisticated orchestral-style soundtrack still considered to be one of the best of all time. We recently spoke with Square Enix North America executive director of sales and marketing Shinji "Tyler" Futami about his early career working on the ActRaiser series to gain insight on its development process and gauge the chances of a modern day sequel.**



Shinji "Tyler" Futami and friend Atom

**You're listed as Enix staff and given a special thanks in ActRaiser 1 and 2, respectively. Can you explain more specifically what your role was in the creation of the series?**

For ActRaiser 1, I was in charge of overseas sales for Enix Japan. I was involved in introducing the game to media as well as participating in sales activities alongside the Enix U.S.A. staff at North American conventions. My involvement in the localization process included translating text, relaying requests for game content alterations to the development team, handling the exchange of assets, creation of the manual and package, and [Nintendo of America] submissions. Since business was not conducted via email at the time, all communication took place through phone calls, mail, or by fax. The going back and forth necessary for text translations was especially difficult, taking up about four hours and 200 sheets of fax paper each day.

**What was it like working with developer Quintet?**

Working with Quintet was an extremely creative process, and while the methods may have been time consuming, their uncompromising attitude toward game development deserves great respect even when compared to the standards of today. I am extremely proud to be able to say that, because of my extensive involvement with the overseas development procedures, I eventually became the lead producer for Quintet titles. I am not sure of the details of the on goings at Quintet [today]. But I hear that they are still involved in game development.

**One of the most distinct aspects of ActRaiser is its mix of action and city building. Were these originally two separate games combined together or was this always part of the plan?**

The game created prior to ActRaiser as a prototype was a typical RPG-type game, which received reviews saying it was similar to Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy. I was told by Quintet that based on these reviews, they decided to start again from scratch. However, our mission was to release the game simultaneously with the availability of the SNES hardware, so in an effort to achieve originality in the year that remained for development, we pursued the highest of quality in graphics, music, programming and scenario balance. The resulting creation was a game with a mix of simulation parts with superb side-scrolling action and scenario elements, as well as an orchestral soundtrack that I hear blew away the Final Fantasy team, who were a part of a separate company at the time. All of these elements set the overall tone for this title.

**The gameplay tone changed drastically from ActRaiser 1 to 2, cutting out the city building and considerably ramping up the action difficulty. Why was this different direction chosen?**

ActRaiser, as mentioned previously, received a lot of positive exposure in North America with good sell through and positive media feedback. However, it was decided between Quintet and Enix the next product would not be a sequel to ActRaiser, but a brand new game. The ultimate goal was to create an even bigger IP.

A project was launched in which Enix U.S.A. was requested to create a plan and develop ActRaiser 2. However, Quintet's developing power and lack of human resources at the time limited the project to include only the action parts. We had wanted to create a game like the original, something in a completely new genre in which action and simulation merged, but we had to compromise that ideal, as there was nothing that could be done about the lack of manpower. Also, action and fighting games were very



### SHINJI "TYLER" FUTAMI Career Highlights

**1990**

Futami starts out working on big titles like ActRaiser 1 and 2, Dragon Quest IV, and Soul Blazer at Enix.

**1994**

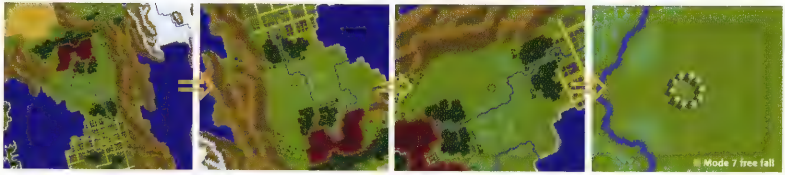
Due to his close relationship with ActRaiser developer Quintet, Futami is promoted to producer on several of the company's games like Robotrek, Illusion of Gaia, and Terranigma. He also produces the Japanese versions of Myst and Riven.

**2003**

Over the years Futami changes gears to promotion on several Dragon Quest and Star Ocean titles. In 2003, Enix merges with Square and Futami moves to the U.S. to become executive director of sales and marketing for North America.

**2008**

In his current position, Futami oversees the release of games like Final Fantasy XII, Kingdom Hearts II, Radiata Stories, Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII, and Dragon Quest VIII.




popular in the North American market at that time, and based on the fact that this popular action element would be a prevalent part of the game, we decided to commence development.

**What does the name "ActRaiser" mean?**
The word was obviously invented, derived from the term "action" from the action-oriented part of the game, and "parameter raise" from the simulation part.

**ActRaiser is one of the few Square Enix games to be released on the Wii Virtual Console. Why was this game selected and are you finding that there's still a big interest in the franchise?**

Fans voiced their wish to revisit the classic gameplay of ActRaiser, and that was definitely a large factor in why we selected this game. Marketing and business elements were of course taken in to account when making the final decision and based on the fact that the original version was also on Nintendo hardware and that the operation for the action part would translate well, we decided that ActRaiser was a suitable candidate for the Virtual Console.

**It's been 15 years since a new ActRaiser title has been released. Will fans ever have the chance to revisit the role of Master in a new ActRaiser game?**

I am grateful for my involvement with Quintet, as my experience there is the foundation of my game producing career. Involvement in Illusion of Gaia and Terranigma, which we developed together, formed the basis for what I pursue in the essence and quality of a good game and taught me the hardships and rewards of game development. ActRaiser is definitely an epoch-making title, and I can understand why one would be compelled to raise this kind of question. I am no longer involved in development, so please just consider this as a "fan's" opinion, but I would love to see a new release of ActRaiser, as well. ■■■

### ACTRAISER

ActRaiser's unique mix of action and sim made a huge impact upon its initial release. Players control the Master (essentially God) as he clears out the evil Tanzra's dungeons with his sword and mix of magic (Magical Stardust is the best!) in combat sequences heavily influenced by games like Castlevania. Once a stage is clear, the land can be populated and developed with the help of a small cherub in a top-down sim view. Monsters still attack the townspeople, so you must direct construction towards their spawn points to seal them up for good. A combination of "miracles" like rain, wind, and even earthquakes help to satisfy or punish citizens' constant pleas for help. One of the coolest early uses of Nintendo's much-promoted Mode 7 effects happens when you take a flying leap out of the sky palace and fall into an active volcano/forbidden temple.

### This Month In Gaming History

During the month of February in 1994, Sega released Sonic the Hedgehog 3. This marked the debut of Knuckles the Echidna, basically a grumpier, redder, and punchier version of Sonic. Even now no one knows what the hell an echidna is or what purpose this species serves. According to the Internet, real echidnas have much pointier noses than Knuckles.



### SOUNDTRACKS

Yuzo Koshiro's musical score for the original ActRaiser is one of gaming's great masterpieces. Find the original tracks on iTunes or track down the excellent version recorded by a live symphony.



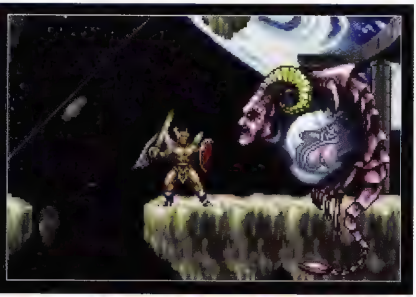

Yuzo Koshiro Best Selection, Vol. 1: ActRaiser Original Soundtrack iTunes – $5.99



Symphonic Suite from ActRaiser Yuzo Koshiro

### ACTRAISER 2

Gamers expecting more of the same out of ActRaiser 2 were hit with an ice-cold splash of water to the face. Players still take on the role of Master and visit cities throughout the world, but action platforming is the only gameplay option. This isn't an unforgivable sin, but it takes away what made the original game so unique and the difficulty was cranked to ridiculous heights. Perfecting the touchy glide mechanic is mandatory for relatively frequent near-impossible blind jumps, and the punishing mix of bosses and annoying minions ensures you'll see the game over screen constantly. However, if you've got the skills and patience to make it through ActRaiser 2's 14 stages, you'll see intriguing level designs and enemies along the way. Also, the intro to the final stage has you crash what is essentially the kingdom of heaven into the devil's lair. You actually have to clamber down a pile of rubble and dead angles to face Tanzra once and for all.










MSX2

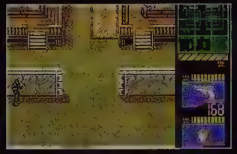
## METAL GEAR 2: SOLID SNAKE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** 1990




This is the true sequel to the original Metal Gear, not to be confused with the non-canon Snake's Revenge for the NES. Many of the series' pivotal story moments take place during this game, like the supposed death of Gray Fox and Snake's final fight against Big Boss. Unfortunately, in order to get to those moments, you must endure some of the most ridiculous situations Solid Snake has ever seen. One boss fight consists of shooting remote-controlled missiles at a crazy doctor riding on Snake's back, and you may also face a humiliating death at the fangs of a Zanzibar Hamster. Every Metal Gear title has its silly parts, but the gameplay can't even redeem them in this entry; Metal Gear 2 introduced the crawling mechanic, but the game's focus on constant backtracking and keycard acquisition makes it too repetitive. Since the game didn't originally release in North America, your best option for playing Metal Gear 2 is the bonus disc in Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence. It includes the first two Metal Gears in their original forms, but only diehard fans will find the experience rewarding.








ARCADE

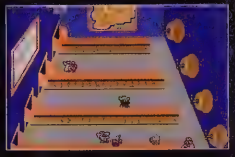
## TAPPER

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BALLY MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** BALLY MIDWAY > **RELEASE** 1983




Even in the modern video game world that we now live, it's rare to find an example of alcohol advertisement in video games. That might be the only instance in which the 1980s were a more progressive time. When Tapper first hit the bars back in 1983 it fit right in. With a brass rail running along its bottom, drink holders to the side, and a handy built-in spot for an ashtray, Tapper was designed to look like a place where everybody knew your name. Of course, the Budweiser connection made the game difficult to market to arcades filled with pimply high schoolers, so a year later Root Beer Tapper hit the market. Whatever the beverage of choice, the games played identically. Essentially an exercise in time management, Tapper had you serving beer (or soda) to cowboys, football players, and aliens. Managing the influx of new customers and old empty mugs quickly became a frantic attempt that required sober focus. But, as is the case with most classic games, the elegance of Tapper's simplistic gameplay has preserved its entertainment value.





PSONE

## TEKKEN 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** 1996



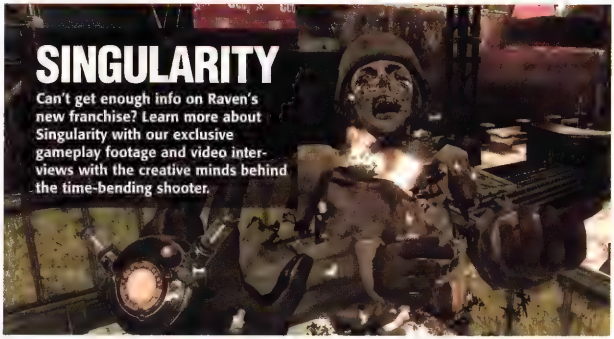

In 1996, Tekken 2's sexy PSone graphics and impressive 25-character roster made it a fighting genre beast. Like many early 3D games, however, Tekken 2's visuals hold up about as well as Courtney Love's post-Cobain career. The fighting mechanics are solid, with all the punches, kicks, throws, and counters fighting fans demand. However, this entry features seriously gonzo physics, with characters leaping dozens of feet and floating anime-style through the air. Later Tekken games ditched this mechanic in favor of a faster, more intimate fighting style that quickly became a series hallmark. Though Tekken 2 is undeniably competent at allowing two players to beat the heck out of each other, historically it's little more than a curiosity that came out before the franchise came into its own with Tekken 3.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Tekken 2 (GI #38, 06/96)

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# GAMEOVER

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## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

**Have you undertaken your video game spirit quest yet? You haven't?! What's wrong with you? You need to get on that. Take this quiz and you will begin to perceive your gaming totemic spirit beast. Use your score to discover what powerful beast awaits at the end of your dream vision.**

**1 Having sold 7.47 million units worldwide, what is the best-selling fighting game ever?**
- **A.** Soul Calibur
- **B.** Super Smash Bros. Brawl
- **C.** Tekken 3
- **D.** Virtua Fighter 4

**2 Which isn't the title of an Oddworld game?**
- **A.** Stranger's Wrath
- **B.** Abe's Exoddus
- **C.** Adventures 2
- **D.** Abe's Odyssey



**3 What nausea-inducing 1995 PlayStation game featured the hopping protagonist Robbit, a robotic rabbit sent from Universal City Hall to save Earth from emptiness?**
- **A.** Hopping Around
- **B.** Jumping Flash
- **C.** Bouncing Jolt
- **D.** Leaping Carrot



**4 Who published the sniper game back in 2000 where you were out to save the president and his family? You know the one, Silent something-or-other.**
- **A.** Capcom, and the game was called Silent Scope, stupid
- **B.** Capcom, and the game was called Silent Shooter, dummy
- **C.** Konami, and the game was called Silent Scope, idiot
- **D.** Konami, and the game was called Silent But Deadly, dimwit




**5 What NES title was the first game to implement the famous Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A Konami code?**
- **A.** Gradius
- **B.** Life Force
- **C.** Contra
- **D.** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



**6 Before its final release, which 2008 game was refused classification by the Australian censorship board OFLC for its realistic visual representations of drugs?**
- **A.** The Club
- **B.** Professor Layton and the Curious Village
- **C.** Grand Theft Auto IV
- **D.** Fallout 3

**7 Which one of these guys has never been a Mega Man boss?**
- **A.** Gutsman
- **B.** Toad Man
- **C.** Yamato Man
- **D.** Power Man




**8 According to the ESRB, the total amount of games released on each current-gen console is 859, 686, and 394. Order the consoles, starting from most to least.**
- **A.** Wii, Xbox 360, PS3
- **B.** Xbox 360, PS3, Wii
- **C.** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii
- **D.** Xbox 360, Wii, PS3

**9 You can change the strength of vibration on your Wii remote by going into Wii settings.**
- **A.** True
- **B.** False

**10 What was Link's catch-phrase in his Friday cartoon series? (Hint: he said it at the end of every opening credit sequence)**
- **A.** Well, sooory Zelda!
- **B.** Well, paaaardon me, Princess!
- **C.** Well, excuuuse me, Princess!
- **D.** Shut up, Princess. I'm watching the game.



## BREAKDOWN

**240 million** dollars of debt is what Midway faces if the Mortal Kombat publisher cannot pay off an already existing 150 million dollar debt.

**53 percent** of adults over 18 play video games, according to a survey from Pew Internet & American Life.

**20 percent** of games released actually make a profit, according to Electronic Entertainment Design and Research.

**1,070,000** dollars have been raised so far in 2008 by Child's Play, the children's hospital charity driven by Penny Arcade and the wider video gaming community. They're always accepting donations.

**70 katrillion** isn't even a number, but it should be.

## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



**0-1** In a grassy clearing, you come upon the goomba. He totters over to you, stupidly bumps into a tree, and turns back the opposite way. You must learn from your totem to accept the numerous people who will step upon you throughout your short and unhappy life. Especially plumbers.

**2-3** Emerging from a cloudy shroud of smoke, you realize you've been following a small yellow sparking animal. He turns to you, and queries: "Pika?" We're sorry.

**4-5** Oh, man! Your spirit creature is a colossus. Look how big and strong you are! And hairy! That's pretty sweet. You might want to watch out for those obviously shining weak points all over your body.

**6-7** Emerging from a trance, you find yourself floating high above the ground, and there's your spirit creature at your side. It's one of those sweet dragons from Lair! Now if only you could fly straight and turn around when you want to. You are doomed to a life of tilt-controls.

**8-9** At the end of a long tunnel, you emerge to stand beside your spirit guide animal. It looks like he was made in the Spore creature creator. On the bright side, you're likely to be doing a lot of evolving over the course of the next 10 hours or so. Bad news? You have seven eyes and three legs. Good luck on your date this Friday.

**10** Holy god of war! Your totem appears to be Kratos. He's not even a creature. He's just that awesome. Go kill a titan, or something.

**Video Game Trivia Answers:** 1. B 2. D 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. D 7. D 8. A 9. B 10. C

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